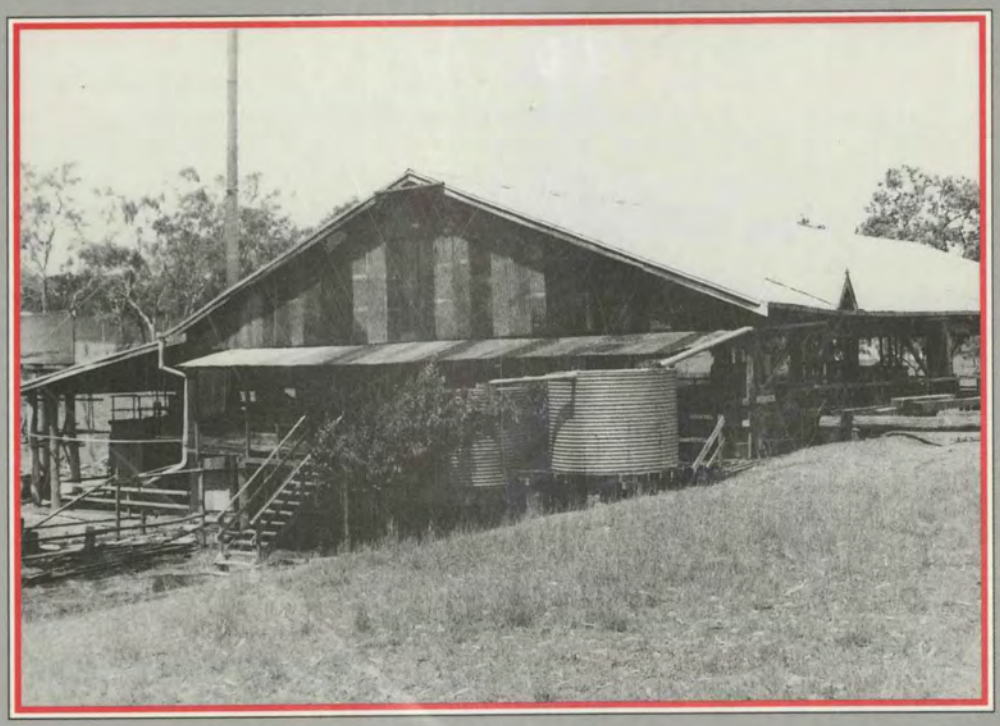
The Coffee-pot Mill

A History of the Elgin Vale Steam-powered Sawmill



Tony Matthews Ph.D.

Kilkivan Shire Council

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Tony Matthews was born in Swansea, South Wales, in 1949. He arrived in Australia in 1972 after which he soon became involved in researching Australian history. Working in television for eight years, he wrote and produced a number of highly acclaimed television documentaries that have been broadcast across Australia. He is the author of nine books on a wide variety of subjects, ten major television documentaries and approximately four hundred radio programmes which he wrote and narrated for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. His books and feature articles for many newspapers and magazines have been published in Australia, England, the United States and New Zealand and his television documentaries are distributed educationally world-wide. Dr Matthews is a former lecturer of the Hervey Bay campus of the University of Southern Queensland, he has an honours degree majoring in history and completed his Ph.D. in 1995. He is married and lives with his wife, Lensie, in Warwick, Queensland, and is currently researching a history of the South Burnett.

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A Cleft of Diamonds

Non-fiction:

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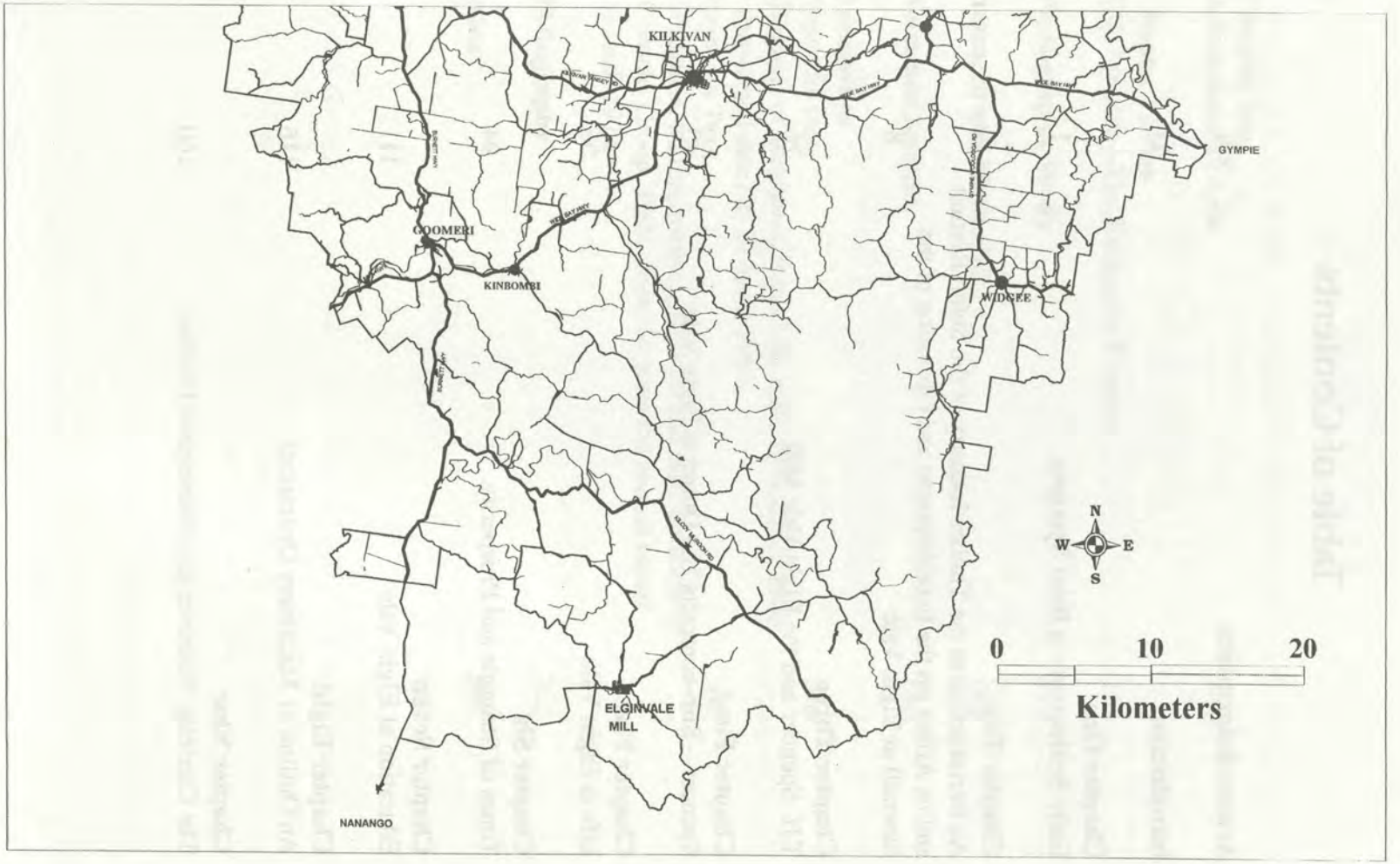

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Introduction

The history of the Elgin Vale steam-powered sawmill—one of many such mills dotted throughout the South Burnett which former Queensland minister for lands (and later premier) William McCormack, once referred to as: '... (those) coffee-pot mills'—situated at the southern extremity of the shire of Kilkivan, is both colourful and diversified—linking as it does the history of the timber industry on the South Burnett with more modern aspects of that industry and offering contemporary heritage perspectives of this region's rural and industrial past. Now that the sawmill has been preserved for posterity—firstly by the joint Nanango and Kilkivan Shire Councils and more latterly by the Kilkivan Shire Council alone—it allows us to investigate the history and operations of the mill and to deliberate the important role it played in the multi-faceted annals of the timber industry on the South Burnett.

Yet the history of this mill has been somewhat elusive, for a number of reasons. Early pioneers of the timber industry on the South Burnett—and there were very many—generally did not regard the work they carried out as having any particularly important historical significance. To those early timber-getters, teamsters, mill hands and mill operators, the work they were doing was generally routine, possibly mundane, it was difficult, labour-intensive, sometimes dangerous, but few thought to record their actions for posterity and so we are left with little information in the way of personal narratives, diaries or reminiscences. At least this is certainly the case in the history of the Elgin Vale mill. The first owner and operator of the mill, Thomas Herbert Spencer, timber-merchant, commission agent, local politician, left few important documents for historians to ponder over, and, as we shall later see in this history, when the mill was owned by Wilson Hart sawmills in Maryborough, documents concerning the history of the mill were destroyed, along with vast quantities of other documents, when the Maryborough mill was closed down in the 1980s, since then whatever documents that were left have been widely distributed and have required careful historical research in order to trace them. Some documents, later identified, were stored for approximately fifty years and then destroyed just seven weeks before their owner was interviewed for this history.

Thus, the tracing of the history of the Elgin Vale mill has been something of a crusade against time. To attempt to find the documentation that still remains before it too is lost forever, and to locate and interview people who have

personalised knowledge of the mill—those who worked there or had any kind of interest in the mill before that important store of knowledge is also lost. This history then, is compiled from a variety of source materials, primarily original documents and interviews with people who either worked at the mill or who lived at or near Elgin Vale during the time the mill was in operation.

Chapter One

Early Settlement, a Brief Synopsis

The site where the Elgin Vale sawmill was later erected once formed a part of the well-known Manumbar station. Settled in 1848 by John Mortimer, the station, some 64,000 acres in size, constituted one of the earliest such holdings on the South Burnett. It was comprised of four blocks, Manumbar, Gobonga, Toomcul and Gallangowan.[1] Mortimer ran the property as a sheep station, with all the difficulties and troubles that that type of farming was subjected to in those days. The sheep were raised primarily for their fleece, there being little market for the meat in the days before refrigeration made transportation of such a commodity possible. The sheep were usually boiled down to make tallow, the hides were sent to the markets in Brisbane or Sydney. Sheep raising during those formative years was particularly problematical, the animals were prone to disease, especially catarrh and foot-rot, they suffered from the debilitating impact of spear-grass, and the aboriginal people, believing that it was their right to do so, killed many of them for food.

Life on that early holding was difficult and tenuous, the residents, John Mortimer and his wife, their shepherds, cooks and other staff, frequently having to deal with the hostility of the aboriginal people, yet Mortimer, unlike many of his contemporary pastoralists, managed to maintain a reasonably friendly relationship with the aboriginal people on his station.

As we now know, the policy of the colonial government in Sydney to allow vast tracts of land to be taken up by a relatively small number of wealthy squatters was a poor one for the future settlement of the country. These land barons took up enormous tracts of land, the best available, thus preventing the wide-scale settlement and development of the land. These squatters, at least in the early stages, did little to improve the land, few fences were erected and even fewer crops were grown. As there was little in the way of transportation other than the laboriously slow bullock wagons there was hardly any point in growing large crops as they could never be economically transported to market. In order to remedy this the government introduced a policy of closer settlement whereby the land leases were resumed by the government and re-leased in far smaller blocks to the everyday farmer. These resumptions were later to coincide with a Queensland government policy to introduce a rail system into the interior, thus opening up the land to frequent, reliable and relatively low cost

James & Margaret Porter circa 1900.

Source—Douglas Porter

transportation. With such a policy in place the small landholder could then grow his crops, access a transport system, get his produce to market and thus increase the general wealth of the colony. This policy of closer settlement and the introduction of a rail system also brought within reach the vast natural wealth of the colony, gold and copper; and even more importantly, the considerable tracts of timber that stretched as far as the eye could see over the rolling hills of the South Burnett.

The site where Elgin Vale is now located was the first such resumption from Manumbar. The land was resumed in 1879, and was taken up by two brothers, James and Alexander Porter, who had migrated from Scotland in 1849. The

Porters were already experienced farmers, they had a sheep property, 'Roseneath', approximately seven miles south of Pittsworth on the Darling Downs, and, initially at least, they used their Elgin Vale property for sheep rearing until they, like so many other settlers, experienced difficulties with spear grass and they transformed the holding to the production of cattle. According to Ruth Porter, a descendant of James Porter, the Porters would drive their sheep from Elgin Vale to their Pittsworth holding via Tarong, Cooyar and Rosalie. At Pittsworth they would be washed and shorn. During these somewhat epic journeys the Porter brothers would carry logs of silky oak or cedar aboard a bullock wagon—timbers taken from the Manumbar scrub—and these logs were used in the construction of their buildings at Pittsworth.[2] The brothers constructed the original Elgin Vale homestead, this was later replaced by the substantial structure that can still be seen today. It was constructed from timbers taken from the region—the logs being sawn at the site with a portable engine and saw-bench.[3]

The partnership between James and Alexander was a particularly successful and harmonious one—according to Ruth Porter. However, Alexander is reputed to have been the possessor of a famous Scottish temper and was also something of an eccentric, at least in some ways. Ruth Porter claims: 'Everyone called him Sandy, and Arthur Braithwaite, an old Murgon identity, remembered Sandy clearly. Arthur Braithwaite died in 1971, and he was ninety-two then ... (He) saw Sandy walk out of a restaurant in Murgon or Nanango and grab a table-cloth from a table that was set up for a dozen people and pull it as he went out the door, and just threw a twenty pound note on the floor, to pay for the ... (damage). He apparently just did that sort of thing ... Everybody was fearful of Uncle Sandy because he had this really fearsome reputation.'[4]

In 1912 James Porter wrote an account of his life, describing the difficulties he encountered when he and his family arrived in the colony of Queensland and their subsequent actions. This account is presently held by Douglas Porter, James Porter's grandson. James Porter stated:

> My parents arrived in Brisbane in July 1849 bringing out a family of four sons and one daughter, I being the eldest 14 years of age. My father and younger brother Sandy (Alexander) at once entered the employment of Mr Andrew Petrie grandfather of the present member for Toombul. The former at the munificent wage of 24/- per week and the latter as cowboy at 2/6, I myself with the consent of my father went as 'caddy boy' on board the steamer *Eagle*. Caddying between Sydney and Brisbane I remained at this for about 4 months when I left and entered Mr Andrew Petrie's employment to learn the joinery trade also receiving half a crown a week and my board, while

father had to keep me in clothes and find me tools. As I had been working since nine years of age you may depend my education was not much, but Mr Petrie had a tutor attending the younger members of his family at night and I participated in what instruction was going afterwards. I paid 1/6 per week for evening school.

Mr Petrie being blind, when I had any spare time got me reading for him and varied this by instructing me in rudiments of geometry. Thus I spent my time working from 10 to 12 hours a day, then in evenings acquiring what little education I ever received, until September 1851 (when) news came to Brisbane that gold had been found at Summer Hill N.S.W. and steamer after steamer brought word of the big finds that were being got so that by September everyone who could get away had left and Brisbane was like a deserted village. My father being without the means to leave by steamer, determined to travel overland and while doing so earn enough to keep mother and the family in his absence ...

Over the following years, James, his father and brother were prospecting at various regions, including Victoria and on the Darling Downs, without striking it rich—although they managed to earn a decent living by working at numerous stations. James's memoirs continue:

In February (1859) we again started off to go back to the Burnett district and came to Toowoomba ... but went out to Eaton Vale to see an old friend who had a contract there and this was the turning point of my career. Mr Watts heard we were in at the station and sent for us offering us work at good prices, so we went on and closed with him for several sheep yards ... We commenced and nearly completed a stock yard when Mr Watts in August made up his mind to have a steam washpool erected. He gave me an unlimited number of men and I had the first sheep turned out on October the 15th, raising water for spouting by the first engine that was brought over the range. After this washpools became all the rage while I was constantly at Eaton Vale my brother erected a washpool on Gourie and another at Western Creek. Under Mr Watts and my esteemed friend the late Sir Hugh Nelson we had always as many contracts as we could carry out and for which we got invariably the price we asked. One year our gross earnings amounted to over £1,300. I remained on Eaton Vale until twelve months after the advent of Mr Ramsay and left the employment the beginning of 1869. Then we

took large contracts from Sir Joshua P. Bell of Jimbour and at the end of 1869 finding we had some spare cash took up our first selection under the 1868 act, 2,000 acres near Tumerville. In 1872 finding we had not enough of elbow room and the North Branch Homestead area being then thrown open we each selected 320 acres which in a short time we were able to increase to 640 acres under the J.B. Stephens Extended Act and thus we later on increased by purchase to 4,000 acres where we have made our homes and where probably we will die and be buried. My mother died in 1900 and is laid to rest in the North Branch cemetery which is situated nearly in the centre of our property. She had for some years previous to her death resided with me with the exception of annual visits to my brother's of a few weeks. Except our parents the whole of the Porter family who came to the colony in 1849 are alive and I am pleased to say prosperous and all have had large families. I have had eight sons and two daughters born to me.

James Porter died in August 1912, shortly after he wrote this account. The local newspaper, the *Pittsworth Sentinel,* then published:

The death occurred in Toowoomba in the early hours of Wednesday morning of James Porter, of North Branch. Deceased had reached the advanced age of 77 years 9 months and had always enjoyed sound health. Latterly he was stricken with a malady which owing to his advanced age he was unable to withstand and the end was not unexpected. The remains were brought to Pittsworth by train on Wednesday and placed in the Masonic Hall. A large number of friends took advantage of the opportunity to pay their last respects to the fine old pioneer.

The funeral on Thursday was very largely attended, a short service was held in the Masonic Hall. Mr Hardy played the *Dead March* ... The remains were interred at North Branch Cemetery and as it wended its way from Pittsworth was joined at various points of the route by additional members of mourners. Rev. Mr Stanley officiated at the graveside. There were a large number of floral tributes. Few men have played a more honourable part in the development of the State than the late Mr Porter. He was a native of Perth Scotland where he was born in 1835 and with his parents and other members of the family arrived in Queensland in 1849. His early manhood was spent in Brisbane, scarcely deserving the name of a village in those days.

As a lad he possessed the observant and critical faculties so prominent in later years and his mind was stored with anecdotal and reminiscences of those far off days before Separation when this State was part of New South Wales.

Ere the Darling Downs was discovered by Alan Cunningham and when the blacks were almost daily throwing down the gauge of battle to the invading white man. In those early years Mr Porter was brought into close touch with the late Mr Tom Petrie of whom he had always spoken in terms of great affection, although many years the junior of Mr Petrie, the two seemed to have been inseparable companions, and it was from Mr Petrie that Mr Porter acquired his knowledge of much of the history of Queensland prior to the landing of the Porter family.

After receiving his education at Brisbane, Mr Porter and his brothers came to the Downs. For some years he was engaged at Eaton Vale under Mr Watts and ... afterwards Sir Hugh Nelson. He came to be regarded as a first class authority upon wool and sheep and may be said to have established wool washing on the Downs. He was not the type of man to rest content in service of others and in conjunction with his brother Sandy, acquired pastoral areas of North Branch and afterward on the Burnett ...

Mainly to efforts of the firm (J & A Porter) a new era in wool growing was inaugurated and high quality wools began to take the place of inferior classes common on the Downs in the early days of Queensland generally speaking. The late Mr Porter had a forthright and commanding personality ... He was for some years a member of the Jondaryan Shire Council from which he subsequently retired after doing good service which ratepayers have ever recognised. He was the possessor of a remarkably keen and subtle brain which lost none of the vigour or skill even after he had exceeded the allotted 3 score years and 10.

He was an ardent ... politician with unerring instinct for solving the problems of human nature and no one carried more weight in political councils than he as an opponent. He was a man to be dreaded but in all dealings with either friend or foe, he was regarded as upright and sincere. Everyone knew his opinions and knew that he was accustomed to having his own way. He had a wholesome contempt of hypocrites and many a well laid political plot he has confounded by his foresight. Although a conservative of the old school, it is remarkable that during the many years in which he gave employment

> to a large number of men, he never had to face a labour trouble. He was an interesting raconteur and had a most retentive memory. Hours would pass like minutes when the veteran chose to delve into the past and recount incidents which to the majority were buried in oblivion. His accounts of the atrocities by aborigines at Hornet Bank and Cullin la Ringo have been published times and again. For Mr Porter wielded a graphic pen and journalism lost a champion when he gave his hand to wool. He had contributed numerous articles to the press and the robust character of the man was evident even in his writings. He was a stalwart Freemason and was on two occasions Master of Lodge, Pittsworth. His demise has left the district the poorer as he was naturally a leader of men. As a Justice of the Peace he was regarded as the soul of honour ... He married in 1865 to Miss Margaret Davidson of Eaton Vale.[5]

The original Porter property, 'Roseneath' is still in existence near Pittsworth.

Other selectors of the region included the Hunts, Downers and Banks families. Another well-known selector was Samuel Henry Glasgow, a Scot from Glasgow who also took up land from the original Manumbar station, reportedly in 1898,[6] and called his property 'Ivanhoe'. Mr Glasgow served for many years on the Kilkivan Shire Council, his brother Robert was also an early selector.

Chapter Two

An Introduction to the Timber Industry of the South Burnett and its Affect on the Establishment and Operation of the Sawmill at Elgin Vale

To understand and appreciate the history of the Elgin Vale sawmill, and to be able to place the mill in its correct perspective, it is necessary to firstly detail some of the general history of the timber industry of the South Burnett region. This area, which now covers the shires of Kingaroy, Kilkivan, Nanango, Murgon and Wondai, was once one of the most densely forested areas in the state, rich in both softwoods and hardwoods. This enormous natural wealth, far richer in terms of real prosperity to the burgeoning colonial economy of the mid-nineteenth century than any of the mineral deposits of the area, was harvested by large numbers of workers over many years. This harvesting was an almost brutal destruction of the natural forests, but it provided a basis upon which grew important infrastructures such as roads, towns and more importantly, a comprehensive rail system that was constructed to service not only the agricultural industries, but also the needs of the timber workers.

There were three distinct phases in the history of the timber industry on the South Burnett. The first was the clearing of the land for agricultural use, trees being simply felled and burnt or left to rot, the second came as the early European settlers attempted to save what woods they could, transporting relatively small numbers of the logs by bullock teams to mills as far away as Maryborough or Brisbane; and the third came following the introduction of the rail system when timber-getters began to move enormous amounts of logs to a wide cross section of mills, both locally and interstate. It was during this period that the real wealth of the timber industry was made and when the magnificent forests were subjected to widespread clear-felling operations without any real consideration of, or attempts at, silviculture procedures or any serious attention to the ecological impact such felling would have on the biodiversity of the region.

This last period, the harshest and the richest, was not to last. With the coming of the railway line to Kilkivan in 1886 the timber industry began to grow. At the turn of the century when the rail line reached the 56 mile peg at what is now known as Kingaroy, the logs started to arrive at the railway yards in their thousands. However, it soon became apparent, even to the timber-getters and teamsters, that this natural wealth was finite, that the millions of superficial

feet being cut every year could not last, that if measures of preservation were not immediately undertaken, then there would be little timber wealth left for future generations to harvest.

During the early years of European occupation, especially after the advent of closer settlement, the very extensive tracts of timber in the South Burnett were regarded as little more than weeds. Settlers could see the value in the logs but as there was virtually no way of getting them to market—at least not economically, there was little those settlers could do but to ring-bark the trees or simply cut them down and leave them to rot. It was far more important to these men and women to sow in their first crops of maize, pumpkins and wheat, thus the destruction of the stands of timber was of primary importance.

To get logged timber to the markets at Maryborough and Brisbane was a particularly problematical task. The logs were often in formidable or almost inaccessible areas with no roads, mountainous terrain, and with creeks that were either flooded or flanked by impossibly high banks. This rugged country was difficult to navigate at the best of times but with wagons heavily laden with tons of hardwood or pine logs it was almost impossible and especially dangerous. At this early stage in the timber industry there were no specific timber harvesting plans and there was certainly little consideration of any kind of wilderness planning or selection logging. Profitable timber was any kind of wood that would sell into an expanding market, young or mature woods, pine tops, mixed forests, rain-forests and softwoods. These logs were considered to be the new wealth of the colony and were indiscriminately exploited. In his paper read before the Maryborough Chamber of Commerce in 1885, even before the railway lines had been laid to Kilkivan, C.H. Barton stated that the government was to blame for allowing such destruction, adding that parliamentary irresponsibility had been the cause of the: ' ... indiscriminate plunder by anybody who owns a team of bullocks and chooses to pay a trifling licence fee.'[1]

There were, over the years from the 1860s, quite literally dozens of small sawmills, similar to that at Elgin Vale, dotted throughout the South Burnett region at places such as Nanango and, of course Elgin Vale, or Scrubby Paddock as it was originally known. These mills cut logs for a variety of markets, building constructions, railway sleepers, butter boxes for the expanding dairy industry, fruit cases, and many other applications. Some of the locations where mills could be found included Black Snake, Kilkivan, Goomeri, Kabunga, Kinbombi, Manumbar, Gallangowan, Wondai, Barker's Creek and many more. These mills were fed by an army of timber-getters and teamsters who worked together to harvest the wealth of logs that was readily available on the many forest reserves. Using nothing more than hand tools, axes and saws, the early timber-getters

brought down the sometimes enormous logs ready for transhipment to the mills. These logs were then loaded onto heavy wagons and using large teams of bullocks were carried through the scrubs to the mills. The logs these men carted included hoop pine, ironbark, cedar, blue gum and spotted gum, bunya and cypress pines, beech, crow's ash, yellow-wood, silky oak, rosewood and beantree. Profits on these logs were considerable, however, the cypress pine, rosewood and beantree were considered to be of only limited commercial value.[2]

Gold was the catalyst that sparked large-scale European migration into the region we now know as the shire of Kilkivan. The first gold-rush began in May 1868 when gold was discovered approximately six miles from Fat Hen Creek on Kilkivan station, then run by J.D. Mactaggart. The location of the gold was on a small tributary of Fat Hen Creek later named West Coast Creek. Within a few days there were many thousands of miners on the field and more were arriving by dray, on horse and on foot. Later estimates give the number of men on the new goldfield as somewhere between four thousand and four and a half thousand.[3]

It was this catalyst that formed an early requirement for good quality local timbers. As soon as the goldfield had established itself there was a need for buildings, houses, stores and hotels. Miners needed pit-props, coffer dams had to be constructed and timber was used in a number of similar small engineering enterprises. The genesis of Kilkivan gave a considerable impetus to the fledgling timber industry at that time, as did the growth of Nanango, also a mining town that was experiencing a slow but steady growth during the 1860s, a growth that saw the capitalization of local timbers for the building trade. Closer settlement enhanced these needs, settlers required timbers for their houses, barns, stables, fences and many other necessities. These timbers came from a wide variety of areas, including Manumbar and Gallangowan where there was one of the best reserves of pine forests anywhere in the southern regions of the colony. Other areas included softwoods from Mount Sinai and hardwoods from the Black Snake region. There were considerable reserves at Scrubby Paddock (Elgin Vale), Planted Creek, Dadamarine and Fawley.

How much timber was wasted through the indiscriminate clearing of the land is now impossible to accurately estimate, but there were certainly millions of superficial feet of valuable logs that were simply destroyed in order to plant crops. It was a perennial problem that lasted for many years, the press later reporting:

> There is another side, however, to this burning of valuable timber, which is seldom looked at in the present day; but before Queensland becomes many years older this widespread, but at present unavoidable, destruction of what should be profitable raw material

> will be severely felt. It is a thousand pities to see tens of thousands of feet of splendid pine and hardwood being regularly felled and reduced to ashes in clearing farming land, which would have considerable commercial value if it could only be placed on a railway and conveyed to the sawmills, which are compelled to use much smaller and younger trees that ought to be left to grow for the needs of future generations. The entire cost of clearing and fencing many of our scrub and forest farms could easily be paid from the utilising of the timber which is now wasted, and which in time to come must make it much dearer artificially, and through sheer destructiveness, than would be the case if a little more prudence and forethought had been used in providing facilities for transportation to the existing markets. Magnificent timbers of all kinds, which ought to be a source of national wealth, are given to the flames with a prodigality for which there is hardly a parallel to be found anywhere else in these days, when forest conservation is becoming more and more urgent in the older States.[4]

The money to be made from harvesting this wealth of timber was sometimes considerable, but the expenses the timber-getters and particularly the teamsters had to pay in order to carry on their business were also high. These included freight, the cost of licences, royalty payments which had a tendency to increase dramatically, wages, the costs of constructing roadways into the timber reserves, insurances, workers' compensation, interest on loans and many incidental expenses such as food for the men, fodder for the bullock teams, tools and other pieces of equipment and even, at times, the cost of alcohol at the timber-getters' camps.[5]

The first real boost to the timber industry on the South Burnett came with the arrival of the railway at Kilkivan, this was an extension of the Maryborough to Gympie line, and it was the first tentative step of an embryonic rail system that would, over the following half century or so, become an integral part of life and business on the South Burnett.

The railway line into Kilkivan was opened on 6 December, 1886. It was something of a red letter day for the people of the region. With the coming of the railway the entire personae of the small township changed virtually overnight. Opening day was celebrated in traditional style, a report of the event later claiming:

> The ceremony of opening the Kilkivan Railway line just completed to the satisfaction of all parties by Messrs Macdonald and Owen, seems to have attracted much genuine interest in town, the result being that the special train from Maryborough left with a large crowd

of people yesterday morning for Kilkivan to take part in the proceedings.

From early morning on Monday all little Kilkivan was astir to get ready for the momentous event taking place later on in the day. The township was scoured on all hands for chairs, &c., to furnish the banqueting hall, improvised for the occasion out of Mr Mackey's new store near the railway station, and everyone lent a willing hand to ensure its success ...

Shortly after 10, the place began to assume a very lively aspect. The ordinary train from Maryborough meeting the train from Gympie at the junction of the Kilkivan (line), brought the Commissioner for Railways, a large contingent of Gympie folks, and a small number of Maryborough citizens. The Gympie brass band also arrived by this train, and a small procession marched up to the Court House, and made an inspection of the exhibits. Meanwhile, country visitors were pouring in from all the surrounding stations, and buggies and other traps appearing in numbers on the scene, were flying about in all directions. A large and expectant crowd of people assembled at the station to witness the arrival of the special train from Maryborough, and as soon as it had disgorged its human freight, Kilkivan had indeed an animated appearance. The train was composed of 4 carriages and must have contained nearly 800 people, amongst whom were nearly all our leading citizens. A ring having been formed in the station yard, Mr F. Curnow, the Commissioner for Railways, stepped in, and in a few brief words, delegated the duty and honor of declaring the line open to Mr W.G. Bailey, the member for Wide Bay.

Mr Bailey, in pronouncing the line open, said that it was one that he had persistently urged should be constructed almost ever since he had been in Parliament. He heartily congratulated the people of Kilkivan on the excellent means of communication they were now enabled to use, and would lead to a most prosperous condition of things.[6]

With the coming of the railway to Kilkivan the fledgling community became virtually the capital of the South Burnett, from all over the South Burnett region farmers and timber workers could now bring their produce and logs to one central rail head and have them transported to the markets at Maryborough and Brisbane. Within weeks the streets of Kilkivan came alive, it was almost as though another gold-rush had occurred in the vicinity.

Over the following quarter of a century Kilkivan remained the most important centre on the South Burnett. Townships such as Wondai, Murgon, Goomeri and Kingaroy had yet to come into existence and would not do so until the rail lines were extended—after considerable lobbying from local authorities and private residents—after the turn of the century. Goomeri, the rail head to which much of the Elgin Vale timber was taken, did not come to full working capacity until the Boonara land sale of 1911 at which time the old station was broken up for closer settlement—until the line was laid to Goomeri the produce of the region continued to flood into Kilkivan.

The line to Kingaroy was only extended from Kilkivan in 1904, passing as it did so through the small communities where Murgon, Goomeri and Wondai would later spring up as a result of the wealth that rail line would bring. The people of Nanango had spent years lobbying for the line, the question of its extension had long been the subject of a royal commission and bitter divisions over whether the line should be extended from Esk or Kilkivan had polarized the community. The decision of the royal commission, a disappointing one for the people of Nanango, was to extend the line from Kilkivan thus opening up the port of Maryborough to the timber and produce of the South Burnett, but only to take the line as far as the rich Coolabunia Scrub. The terminus would be located at the 56 mile peg in a large paddock that once formed part of Taabinga station. For many residents, especially Nanango residents, this was a poor decision, the line might be terminating in one of the richest regions of the South Burnett but, many claimed, common sense should have dictated that it be terminated in a township of some description, even the minor village of Taabinga would have been preferable to having the terminus in the bush.

Yet despite protestations the line was extended to the 56 mile peg and the township of Kingaroy sprang up at that site.

The official opening of the line to Kingaroy took place on Monday 19 December, 1904, a Brisbane journalist wrote: 'An event of the greatest importance to a vast area of valuable territory took place on Monday, when the extension of Kilkivan branch railway from Wondai to Kingaroy was officially opened for traffic. Wide interest was excited amongst settlers and intending settlers at Mondure, Home Creek, Barambah, Wooroolin, and right through to Kingaroy, Taabinga, and the famous Coolabunia Scrub, and on to Nanango township. Kingaroy, being the site of the new terminus, was the centre of attention. A public holiday was proclaimed.'[7]

Virtually the whole of the South Burnett was now opened up to the timber industry. Within a few dozen miles of the rail terminus there existed millions of superficial feet of logs and the teamsters and timber-getters moved into the bush to collect this rich harvest with dedicated determination. A press report of

that period demonstrates how the timber industry was growing rapidly: 'This district at the present time is undoubtedly the most important source of supply of pine timber in the State, and for the next two or three years at least the rate at which it is being sent away will not only be maintained but will in all probability increase. There are now about fifty teams hauling into Kingaroy, and during last month considerably over one million feet of pine was sent away by the railway. Notwithstanding this big output, saw-millers are feverishly asking for more, and the keen rivalry for supplies is manifested in the frequent visits of sawmilling representatives and the fact that prices are offered in excess of the amount fixed by the Saw-millers' union.'[8]

There were many markets to which the timber-getters could sell their logs, following the coming of the rail many more mills sprang up throughout the region, including the mill at Sefton, owned by T.H. Spencer who later moved it to Elgin Vale, and many of the timber-getters supplied logs to those mills on contract. Other timber-getters transported their logs by rail to Maryborough and Brisbane, some were sent by ship to Sydney.

Problems of costings, or rather reaching an amicable agreement over the prices of logs, were endemic to the mills at Maryborough. The Maryborough mill owners adopted practices that discriminated against the timber-getters and teamsters. They would pay only on the size of the logs after shrinkage and there were many reports of loss of payment due to claims by the mill owners that logs were inferior and had not sawn as expected. Little wonder then that the timber-getters would prefer to supply logs to local mills such as the Sefton mill, and later Elgin Vale, they were paid immediately and there were no problems with allegations of inferiority or log shrinkage during transport. A press report of 1906 claimed:

> After a couple of weeks of hot, unpleasant, muggy weather which has been very trying to man and beast, a change to cooler conditions occurred last night. The farmers would welcome another inch or two of rain just now, and many of the haulers would have no objection to having the dust laid, for it has been very bad lately. Yesterday at Kingaroy several of the teamsters were quite unrecognisable, owing to the thick layers of dust and dirt on their persons.
>
> Log timber is coming in freely now, and is going away as fast as it arrives. It may be thought that our scrubs would show an altered appearance owing to the enormous number of logs that have been taken out of them, and no doubt, in some places there is a difference; but if one ascends one of the hills, and gazes around he is at once impressed with the multitudes—I can find no better word—of pine

tops that the eye rests upon. Seas, oceans of pine trees, stretching as far as the eye can see; billow after billow of hoop, and bunya uprearing their lofty heads on every side. There seems to be no end of them. In proximity to the railway there is a sensible diminution in the numbers of marketable pines, but further back there are enormous reserves of timber. At present the Maryborough millers are in bad odor with the majority of the timber-getters, owing partly to their very hostile attitude re the export of log timber, and partly because the men are beginning to feel that someone has been pocketing enormous profits in which they have had no share. Wherever one drops upon a group of haulers or cutters, he is sure to hear expressions of opinion which are the reverse of complimentary to the Maryborough Saw-millers. Men are beginning to ask how it is that other mills can pay better prices for timber. Also they are wondering why their measurements tally so well with the measurements of other mills, while their measurements are so often in excess of what the Maryborough mills pay for. Again they are perplexed over certain facts which have lately been made known to them—viz., they cannot understand how Sydney millers can afford to sell timber from this district at cheaper rates than it is sold at in Maryborough. If the timber were taken from here to Sydney free of all freightage and charges, it would still puzzle us to understand how the Sydney men manage to sell cheaper than the local millers considering that the southern timber men pay their workers much higher wages than the Maryborough millers do. There is another grievance against the Maryborough mills. Men never know what they are going to get for their labours. Altogether too often when men enquire why they have had their measurements greatly reduced the reply they receive is most unsatisfactory. They are told that 'the timber cut up badly, or there were flaws in such and such logs, etc., etc.' When the logs for the Sydney mills are on the trucks the men can obtain credit notes for their measurements, provided that they tally with the loader's measurements, and the men get paid for those measurements; not for whatever measurements the Sydney men make of it. Maryborough millers, apparently buy the logs, not as logs, but as so many feet of sawn timber. At this rate men would need to wait until their logs had been milled before they would know what was due to them. Why can't they do the thing like the Sydney agents do?—buy the logs straight out and pay for log measurement. A few days ago one of the Maryborough mills had an agent here who was offering the men 3d. (threepence) per 100 more than was paid

> by the agents who are shipping logs to Sydney. Some few took the offer, but they will probably find that the extra 3d. really means a loss of double that amount before long. All the contradiction in the world will not alter the opinions of men who have looked into things, and understand the position. Local millers have done exceedingly well by the men who have had to toil like bullocks, and live like blackfellows to keep the mills supplied, and they are tired of it all. Perhaps it is as well to say that the writer has never exchanged a word, either spoken or written, with the Sydney agents (Appel and Co.).[9]

With the arrival of the rail system and the sudden and somewhat unexpected growth of towns like Wondai, Murgon, Goomeri and Kingaroy, the demand for timber was enormous. For the timber workers this was good news indeed and for the men who ran the wagons the upturn in trade was particularly gratifying. Now, with new mills springing up all over the region, they could afford to repay the substantial debts they had incurred in purchasing their teams of bullocks and their wagons, and many of them could live relatively debt free.[10]

At Kingaroy the timber industry was booming, hundreds of wagons loaded with logs could be seen arriving at the rail terminus each week.[11]

At the commencement of hostilities in Europe in 1914 the timber industry, world-wide, grew dramatically. Suddenly the need for good quality timbers was a matter of great urgency and the heavily timbered regions of the South Burnett; regions such as Gallangowan, Johnstown, Manumbar and Elgin Vale, were ideally situated to supply much of that demand. Timbers were needed for a wide variety of purposes, both military and civilian, both overseas and locally. There was an inherent patriotism associated with Australian produce and timbers. State governments such as the South Australian government would use only products of British or Imperial manufacture, British iron, Canadian pines, and softwoods and hardwoods from Australian forests. Within months of the commencement of war thousands of tons of logs were being cut and carted out from the forests of the South Burnett. This enormous increase in trade did much to boost local prosperity, softwoods and hardwoods were being processed in quantities never before envisaged. Local mills sprang up in almost all the heavily forested areas of the South Burnett, those, at least, which had been opened up for selective logging.[12]

The heavy demand for logs and the almost unrestricted clearing of the forests had to end, of course, and by 1918 when the Great War was drawing to a close it was realised that if such wide-scale logging was not immediately restricted then the industry would ultimately dwindle and die for the lack of suitable logs. By that time a logging shortage was imminent and prices were soaring, not simply because of the dwindling supply but because of grossly inflated government royalties. Private forests had been almost completely cleared and only state forest lands still supported a wide diversity of suitable timbers. The dramatic rise in state royalty fees had seriously affected several aspects of the Australian domestic economy. Housing, for example, was more expensive, and so too were rents; furniture, shop fittings, cases and packing crates for the fruit and dairy industries and a whole cross section of wood-based products had risen steeply in price.[13] These sharp increases in royalties were having a detrimental impact on the business lives of the timber-getters and teamsters, a deputation of whom met with the lands minister, Mr J.H. Cloyne, in November 1918 to protest the fact that royalties had risen by 110 per cent in the previous six months. They argued that such rises were untenable, but Cloyne simply rejected their demands, he claimed that with the forests rapidly dwindling there had to be a way of maintaining some form of controlled logging, and to aid this the royalty rate placed a brake on such logging.[14]Additionally, of course, the state government was earning vast taxes through the royalties on timber, taxes that were badly needed to press through with further rail constructions in order to open up the land for closer settlement.

Despite these problems the government certainly aided the timber industry with its policy to construct war service homes for returned soldiers and their dependents. Not only did the government purchase large quantities of timber, but it also acquired some mills, tramways and timber estates.[15]

With dwindling supplies of logs as the timber reserves close to rail lines became cleared, by 1923 it was a matter of urgent necessity to build rail lines into regions where further supplies could be easily and economically reached. Two of these regions were, of course, the vast forestry reserves in the Manumbar and Gallangowan districts. A rail line from Goomeri to Manumbar would, it was acknowledged, open up these reserves, the vast natural wealth of Gallangowan, Elgin Vale, Toomcul, Johnstown and other regions in the district. However, the 1920s were problematical years for the state government which was experiencing enormous financial difficulties, difficulties that would lead to a state depression and the virtual cessation of public works projects such as the construction of the rail system.

The economy of the state was in such poor condition during the 1920s that the premier, Edward Granville Theodore, had been forced to travel to England

and America seeking funds with which to prop up the ailing economy. However, these were tense political times. Theodore's Labor government had previously passed the highly controversial Land Act Amendment Act, an act that enabled the government to increase rents on rural leases by up to fifty per cent. This was regarded as a form of treachery by the majority of the people, many of whom had entered into agreements with the government to lease land at specified rentals. The act was almost immediately dubbed the 'Repudiation Bill', and the political costs to Theodore were enormous. When he travelled to London in March 1920 seeking financial aid from British financiers his visit had been preceded by three very influential men, Sir Robert Philp, founder of the Burns Philp Company, Sir Alfred S. Cowley, chairman of directors of the Bank of Queensland, and a lawyer named John A. Walsh. These men had briefed the British financial institutions on details of the Repudiation Bill and the financiers, believing that Theodore had reneged on the government's agreements in respect to rents, refused to back him. Theodore was forced to travel to America where he managed to obtain a loan, however, this was a smaller loan than he had wanted and it came with far higher interest rates. Theodore used the failure of his financial mission to call a general election in October 1920. It was a precarious time for his government which was returned with a narrow margin of just four seats, having lost an extra twenty seats during the election.[16]

It was in such a tense political climate that the people of Goomeri and Manumbar were calling for the construction of a new rail line from Goomeri to Manumbar. In truth the campaign waged by the Goomeri people stood little chance of success, not at that stage at least. There were many other lines still awaiting construction, including one from Murgon to Proston that had been started several years previously but then abandoned due to the lack of public funds.

While the owner of the Elgin Vale mill, Thomas Herbert Spencer, had yet to commence operations in the Elgin Vale region at that time, he would almost certainly have been watching (and possibly participating in) the events surrounding the campaign to have a rail line extended to Manumbar. It was a vital issue, one that would affect all the residents in the Manumbar, Gallangowan and Elgin Vale regions. This was 1923, just three years before Spencer would move his mill from Sefton to Elgin Vale where he, and later Wilson Hart, would harvest that enormous natural wealth of the district's forests. It is entirely possible that Spencer would have had a particular interest in the proposed construction of a rail line to Manumbar, and such a line would make his task so much easier and lucrative.

In November 1923 the Goomeri and District Progress Association, in response to a letter from the Maryborough Chamber of Commerce which promised

support in the matter of a rail link to Manumbar, replied with a detailed letter to the Maryborough chamber promising to do what was necessary to have the minister for railways approve such a line. The letter stated:

Dear Sir,

Your esteemed communication of the 22nd ult. has been submitted to my Association and I am directed to comply with your request by furnishing to the Minister for Railways at the earliest moment such information that shall tend to convince him that the above construction would undoubtedly pay more than interest charges on capital involved. Any reply received from the Minister will in due course, be passed on to your Chamber. Though our last appeal to the Minister was unsuccessful, I would like to remind you that we have not relaxed our efforts in the above and both the Manumbar and Goomeri Associations are still awaiting a more favourable period to reiterate their appeal. Your letter was therefore read with considerable satisfaction as members have learnt that we have still the valued support of your Chamber. During recent weeks the District has been visited by Mr Paterson, Forest Engineer, and again more recently by Mr Simon, Chief Forester. These officers have again definitely asserted that their service will be compelled to construct a tram line for the haulage of log timber, if the Government will not sanction the more useful and heavier railroad. It is not within their sphere to ask for the latter construction, which they would prefer, and consequently their remarks have convinced us that to continue our appeal is well worth while. Their information is that Manumbar possesses one of the two largest forests of pine in Southern Queensland and the service has decided that, under a scheme of re-afforestation alongside rail construction, this enormous supply, backed by systematic planning of growth and cutting, will be an important factor in the future activities of the Forest Service. These officers stated confidentially that their department is prepared to offer subsidies towards cost of construction, as they consider the heavier line preferable. It is, therefore, the responsibility of our respective organisations to see that this wealth of timber will not be conveyed to Brisbane by another route as at one time mooted. Any other construction seems unlikely since we have a permanent survey and Chief Engineer Amos (now retired) favored this route, after inspection of theirs, owing to shorter mileage and lower cost of construction. At the same time you will agree that we must not sit back and thus offer encouragement for Kilcoy, or others in opposition, to agitate to our disadvantage. I

> received a letter from your parliamentary member, Mr Weir, during last month stating that he may be able to assist us to advance this proposal a step further at some future date. It seems that our prospects depend entirely on loan moneys being available. My Association, therefore, requests that you will keep this objective well in the foreground and watch with us for a favorable opportunity of again appealing for this desired construction.[17]

However, despite pleas such as this, the rail line was never extended to Manumbar and for the entire life of the Elgin Vale mill, and other mills in the region, sawn timber was trucked from the mills to various locations—principally to the railway station at Goomeri.

These were the years when it was becoming increasingly obvious that with no wide-scale silviculture programs in place, and with such programs only in their infancy, the natural reserves of timber were dwindling so rapidly that the entire industry was doomed unless fresh areas of forestry reserves could be opened up to logging. It was estimated that with a rail line through to Manumbar the forests of that region would give work to hundreds of men and keep several mills in operation for years.[18] Programs were set into place to reafforest large regions of scrub country with both hardwoods and pines. Experiments carried out during the preceding few years had confirmed that it was practicable to reafforest with a variety of trees, including blackbutt.[19]

There is little doubt that the logging and milling industries in the South Burnett at that time were going through something of a crisis. Many people involved in the industry acknowledged that it was necessary to preserve the logs that remained, but it had to be a careful balance. How to preserve the logs while maintaining a viable timber industry and, at the same time, adopt new methods of forest management and implementing reafforestation techniques?

The minister for lands, William McCormack, (later premier), and the director of forests, Mr E.H.F. Swain, had made it clear in policy speeches and through written reports that it would be the government's policy to restrict access to much of the available pine forests thus creating what was later termed: ' ... a starvation of the mills.' A press report claiming: ' ... A policy of partial starvation of the saw mills would have the effect of lessening the amount of employment, and would produce one of two results—a diminution of the wages earned by workers, or an increase in the hourly rate to make up for idle time, which would add to production costs and to the price of sawn timber. The Minister expressed the opinion that at least some mills would have to discontinue, and he thought it better that, what he described as "small coffee-pot mills" which

cannot be worked as economically as the larger and better equipped ones, should be closed up.'[20]

For the owners of mills, people such as T.H. Spencer who was then conducting business through his mill at Sefton, the outlook for the timber industry during the 1920s was anything but bright. Yet Spencer established the mill at Sefton, probably in 1921. The logging industry had always attracted Spencer. His first enterprise in the timber trade was made at Maryborough where he operated a small sawmill with a planing machine at a site situated next to the Dominion flour mill, near one of that city's first cemeteries. Spencer cut and dressed wood at the mill and employed a builder to construct houses in the region. However, the venture was relatively short lived, the mill burned down and, according to Dr H.C. Spencer, T.H. Spencer's son, Spencer later laconically claimed that all he had been left with were ' ... about one hundred and twenty-six bags of charcoal.' Dr Spencer adds: 'He (T.H. Spencer) was his own boss from the age of nineteen ... I can still remember the time, being awakened by somebody at the front door to tell us that this place where he used to do a little bit of sawing and planing ... that the place was on fire ... he was insured, but nowhere near sufficiently.'[21]

Following this disaster Spencer moved his operations to Gayndah where, for a while, he rented a sawmill. This venture was evidently financially successful as he was then able to again move his operations, this time to Biggenden, where he ran another mill, this one owned by him.

While at Biggenden he retained his house at Maryborough where his wife, Ethel (nee Clarke), and their children, Herbert Cyril (known generally as Larry), and Valmai (known as Toppy), then lived. There was also another child, a daughter, but according to Spencer's death certificate this child had predeceased him. Following the Biggenden enterprise Spencer began operations at Sefton. Spencer enlarged an existing house at Sefton and moved his wife there in 1922 or 1923 but his son Larry began boarding at the Maryborough Grammar School and daughter Valmai also remained in Maryborough. Spencer's wife, Ethel, was born in Louth, England and she had been just six years of age when she arrived in the colony with her parents.[22] She married T.H. Spencer at Maryborough when she was twenty-four years of age.[23]

In January 1996 T.H. Spencer's daughter, Mrs Valmai Fowler, recalled:

> Prior to my parents' move to Goomeri we had lived at Sefton, another sawmill which was at some distance from Biggenden ... There was no school within range of Sefton and also there were no children on the property as companions for me, then aged almost 5, so my parents accepted an aunt's offer to have me in Maryborough during term

Thomas Herbert Spencer,
pioneer of the Elgin Vale mill and powerful Goomeri businessman.
Source—H.C. (Larry) Spencer

time, and I went home during the holidays. This aunt was my mother's sister, physically disabled and unmarried, still living in the old family home round the corner from our house at that time. I had known her all my life and she loved me dearly, and my parents knew I would be very happy with her. It was not till I was grown up and married that my brother told me what a great wrench it had been to both of them (Valmai's parents), and how it particularly upset my mother to be parted from me at that age. Much as it grieved them, they felt it best for me, and I understood this, as I would have been such a lonely little girl on Sefton without any playmates. This is probably the place to say that my parents were unfailingly kind and loving, and their greatest wish was to do their best for their children. The ideas in my case usually came from my mother, always willingly and generously supported by my father. I had a very happy childhood. I went home to live full time at the age of about 8 or 9 when my parents were settled in Goomeri, and at the age of 13 went away to boarding school, very much at my own wish.[24]

By the time Spencer began milling at Sefton the early years of the timber boom when tens of thousands of logs were carted to the railhead at Kingaroy were gone. By the middle of that decade gone too were many of the little 'coffee-pot mills' that had once bellowed and thundered and whistled, billowing steam, saws screaming into the freshly cut timber. Like the Queensland economy, the timber industry entered into a depression. The annual forestry report of 1925 painted a gloomy picture of the industry, stating that the pine forests of the state would become extinct within ten years and that the forests of Queensland had been exploited without any consideration or replacement.[25]

One of the problems was, of course, the government's policy of allowing the smaller rural mills to become established contiguous to the forests, as was the case with the Sefton and later the Elgin Vale mills. Such mills were ideally situated to take full advantage of the work of the timber-getters and teamsters, and the amount of logs put through these small mills was, over the years, quite prodigious. Competition between the larger mills in the cities, especially those at Maryborough, and the smaller country mills was acute. The larger mills claimed that the small mills could not produce a good quality product and that there was considerable wastage of wood at the small mills.[26]

Supplies were dwindling and the entire industry was feeling the impact, the teamsters were forced to accept less work, the timber-getters were allowed to cut a decreasing allowance of logs and so the mills began to starve. Teamsters

were forced to dispose of their wagons and animals at considerable losses, timber-getters laid men off work, as did the saw-millers.[27]

It was during this time of profound difficulty that T.H. Spencer, suffering a shortage of logs at Sefton and completely ignoring the problems and the poor prognosis of the timber industry, moved the machinery and saw-benches from Sefton to Scrubby Paddock, now Elgin Vale, to commence operations in one of the richest forestry reserves then remaining in the southern portion of the state. It was a brave move, some would have called it foolhardy, and indeed, as later events demonstrated, the move was, initially at least, one of the most financially difficult Spencer was ever to make. Even the move itself would have been an enormous undertaking. T.H. Spencer's son, Larry, recalls that the mill at Sefton was a large concern, almost the same size as the mill later established at Elgin Vale, not the small traction steam engine portable type of mill which was popular at the time, but a mill utilizing two large boilers and at least one steam engine. All this machinery was moved to Elgin Vale by road transport, either by bullock teams or on the backs of solid-rubber-tyred trucks. Additionally, all the iron work from the mill's roof was removed and transported to Elgin Vale.[28] Spencer did own, or part own, one of the more portable mills, an enterprise at Dadamarine in which it seems, for a while at least, he was in partnership with a man named A. Boldery (also reported as Baldry). According to Larry Spencer this mill was run by a traction engine. In January 1926 the *South Burnett Times* reported:

> Work has been proceeding for some time on the erection of a sawmill and accessory buildings for Messrs A. Baldry (sic) and Sons at Dadamarine Creek, some 32 miles from Goomeri, where this firm holds extensive areas of pine. Several cottages for the mill workers have been completed. Mr Hoskins with his traction engine left Goomeri a few days ago with a heavy waggon load of machinery, but when within a few miles of the mill site he suffered misfortune by the breaking of the counter shaft of his engine. There are two more similar loads of machinery in the railway yard at Goomeri awaiting transport as soon as repairs are effected to the traction engine. It is approximately the same mileage from the mill site to Boompa on the Gayndah line as to Goomeri, but freight rates to Brisbane favour Goomeri and we understand that the sawn timber will later be railed there after having been hauled by traction engine over the intervening 32 miles.[29]

Little is known of this Dadamarine mill, although it was evidently run with some financial success and was prone to the many problems associated with timber milling in those days, shortages of logs and accidents.

The mill was certainly started by Boldery and Sons and Spencer subsequently became financially involved in the enterprise, later taking control and expanding the operations. Spencer evidently took over the operation in 1936, a report in the *South Burnett Times* on 30 November, 1936, then stating: 'Mr W. Boldery has taken his departure from Goomeri. His 2600 acres of land at Dadamarine Creek, with the sawmill and plant, and the right to 1,000,000 feet of pine has been purchased by Mr. T.H. Spencer.' A 1938 report stated: 'Mr T.H. Spencer is erecting a large sawmill on his property at the head of Dadamarine Creek and will be employing a large staff.'[30] That same month there was an accident at the mill, timber cutter Joseph Adams slipped while carrying an axe and was badly cut on his left hand which resulted in massive loss of blood. He was rushed to a doctor at Goomeri in the local mail car.[31]

One report of the mill dated two years later in 1940 stated: 'On Friday last an accident occurred on the Booubyjan Range when a truck loaded with six or seven tons of sawn timber, and driven by Mr B. Baade, backed into a gully four feet deep. The timber was being delivered from Mr Spencer's mill at Dadamarine, when the truck got out of control and ran backwards down the hill. The trailer fell into the gully and the truck continued on, breaking the pole before stopping. Fortunately, there was no timber standing to interfere with the load. The timber was transferred to another truck.'[32]

Chapter Three

T.H. Spencer and the Elgin Vale Mill

The person who set up the Elgin Vale sawmill, Thomas Herbert Spencer, was a man who had a remarkably colourful life and who experienced a great deal of difficulties during his long business career. Today, more than three and a half decades after his death, he remains one of the region's more controversial and colourful characters. Some people remember him as a forceful and powerful businessman who did much good for the general prosperity of the Kilkivan and Goomeri districts, while others have less fond memories of him. As we have seen during previous chapters of this history, when Spencer was considering moving his mill from Sefton to Elgin Vale the timber industry was experiencing a rapid and dramatic decline, a decline forged through numerous external forces, high royalty charges, the lack of log timber, and the low cost of foreign imports, especially Oregon pine from the United States. Spencer has been described as one of Goomeri's leading businessmen, and he certainly took part in both the business and public affairs of the small community. At the time he relocated his mill from Sefton to Elgin Vale he was campaigning to become elected to the Kilkivan Shire Council. He became councillor for Division Three of the council and later served as chairman. Elgin Vale resident Douglas Porter recalls that Spencer:

> ... was an odd character, he started up as a dip builder, that was his job, the dips they dipped the cattle in. Those days they were made out of timber. So he was a dip builder and he was a good one too. He had a garage in Goomeri and he bought a dairy farm out here, about two thousand acres on the Manumbar Road above Elgin Vale. He was a hard case, he was a character, a clever man. He was about five feet eight inches and was carrying a bit of condition when I knew him. He was pretty tough (to his workers) most of the time, he liked his pound for a pound. Although he'd do anything for anybody at any time. In those days there wasn't much traffic and there were times there when he was coming from Goomeri out to the mill he would give people a lift. One time he brought my mother out, she came from somewhere by train and he picked her up and brought her out here ... he lived in Goomeri and came out every day, most days anyway. He came out to oversee the work (of his contractors). He

> tried to get his dairy herd up to five hundred cows but I don't think he ever got up that high, about four hundred, something like that, he had two or three families (working) on the dairy.[1]

In order to provide adequate timber for his proposed mill at Elgin Vale Spencer entered into negotiations with the Queensland Provisional Forestry Board, probably sometime in late 1925 or early in 1926, to purchase ten million superficial feet of pine logs from the forests near Scrubby Paddock. This massive purchase was evidently subject to permission being granted by the Kilkivan Shire Council for the construction of a sawmill to process that timber. The site selected by Spencer was on Portion 10, Reserve 81, Parish of Gallangowan, County of Fitzroy, on the banks of Moonda Waamba Creek. Application for this permission was received from the Lands Department by the council in March 1926. Council minutes revealing that a request had been received: ' ... From the Land Commissioner in connection with the proposed sale of timber in the Parish of Gallangowan and stating that it is expected that the purchaser will require a sawmill site on Water Reserve 81, and desiring to be informed whether the council has any objection to the granting of a special lease for a period of 5 years.

'Resolved that council offer no objection.'[2]

Once permission had been granted Spencer moved quickly on the construction of the mill. On 27 August, 1926, he wrote a letter to the chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council stating that it was his intention to construct a large modern sawmill on Reserve 81. Spencer claimed that the cost of this mill would be approximately twelve thousand pounds, and he was requesting that the Johnstown road between the Barambah Bridge and the south-eastern corner of Graham's Selection no 223, be put in good order. He claimed that he was prepared to assist the council with whatever expenses would be incurred by paying one third of the cost, up to £150. He also claimed that he would maintain that portion of the road for twelve months.[3]

On 1 September, 1926, the council considered Spencer's letter. The contents of the letter were read and discussed and it was finally moved by Councillor Samuel H. Glasgow and seconded by Councillor Isaac Moore that the newly appointed council overseer should inspect the road and make a report to the council.[4]

By August 1926 Spencer realised that the lease he had applied for at Elgin Vale was not large enough to accommodate the work-force required for the mill or their families, nor would the land area be sufficient for the massive amount of logs and sawn timber he would have to stack and store there, and he made a further application for a larger area and for a longer period. Spencer's

new lease, (SL 4985) was granted on 1 September, 1926, for a period of seven years.[5]

The application came through the Lands Office to the Kilkivan Shire Council in October that year. Council minutes reveal that the letter was received:

> ... From the District Land Office stating that T.H. Spencer has purchased from the Provisional Forestry Board, 10 million super feet of pine on State Forest Reserve R154 adjacent to Reserve 81, Parish of Gallangowan, area 400 acres, and finds that the area of 5 acres in Portion 1 which the council has already agreed may be leased is not sufficient for his requirements in the way of workmen's cottages, grazing purposes etc. and desires a special lease for 7 years of the whole reserve and desiring to be informed of the views of the council in the matter.
>
> Moved Chairman, Seconded Cr Perrett that the council have no objection to the granting of a special lease to Mr Spencer of the above Reserve for 7 years.
>
> Carried.[6]

By 7 December that year Spencer's mill was evidently still in a state of construction because the council minutes for that day reveal that a letter had been received: ' ... From T.H. Spencer asking for permission to erect a telephone line branching off the present Barambah line on the Nanango road and continuing along the Scrub Paddock road and other roads to the mill *at present being erected* by him at Water Reserve No 81, Parish of Gallangowan. (Author's italics).

'Resolved there be no objection providing the usual conditions are complied with and timber felled is not left as an obstruction on the roads.'[7] From this report we may assume that apart from logs that were cut for the actual construction of the mill, Spencer did not begin commercial processing until sometime in 1927, possibly late in 1927 as a report published in September that year states that Spencer's mill: ' ... at Manumbar ... ' was still in a state of construction. The report is interesting for it gives us an indication of the state of the timber industry at that time. It stated:

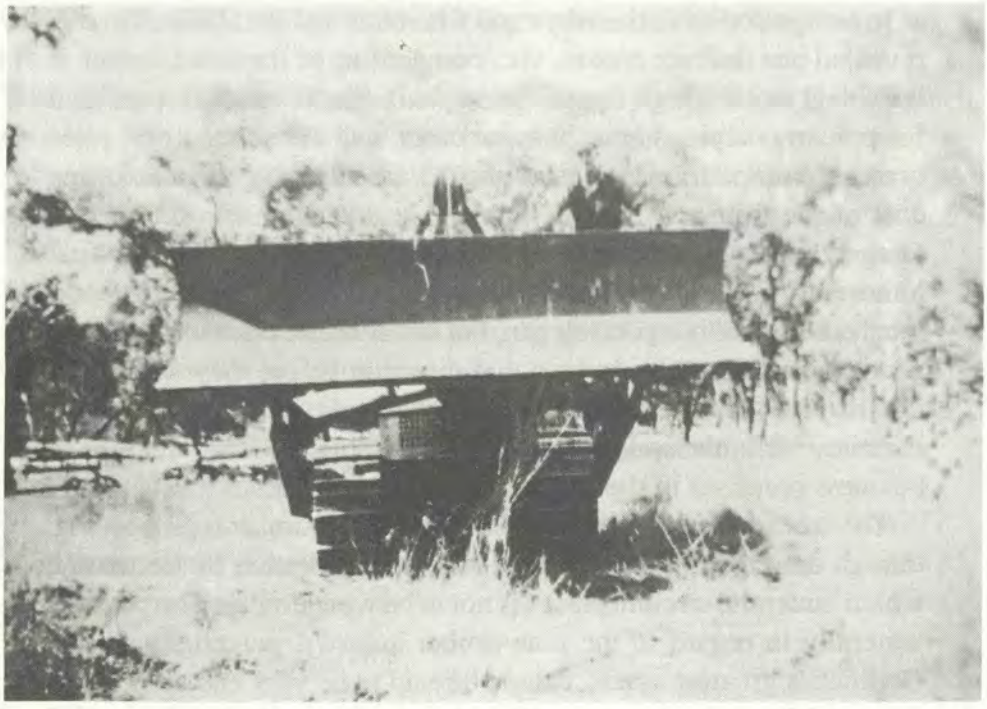
> ... the greatest factor contributing to the township's comparative quietness is traceable to a depression in the softwoods timber trade, for so great are the timber interests operating with Goomeri as headquarters that an easing up of any of the many activities connected with marketing the timber from the pine forests of the hinterland cannot be other than immediately reflected in the township itself. Messrs Skyrings' mill at Kinbombi has temporarily closed down, and but few of the local fleet of big motor lorries are hauling logs.

> Investigation as to the whys and wherefores of the slackness soon revealed one definite reason, viz., competition of imported timber. It is evident that the high figures being paid to the Forestry Department for pine in outlying areas, in some cases well above the upset price owing to competition by rival timber merchants brings the marketing cost of the timber to such a high figure that the imported Yankee Oregon article is being retailed in Brisbane at approximately 6/- per hundred super feet lesser figure than our Queensland pine. 'Support local enterprise' is a good slogan, but builders and contractors would need to be ultra-enthusiasts in that direction before they would pay the increased figure, especially when the quality of the Oregon pine is unimpeachable, indeed it has figured largely in the erection of business premises in the township of Goomeri itself.
>
> The erection of Mr T.H. Spencer's mill at Manumbar is proceeding, though there does not appear to be any acceleration of the matter, which under the circumstances is not to be wondered at. The position generally in regard to the pine timber industry, potentially one of Goomeri's greatest assets, cannot be said to be very encouraging.[8]

The report is also interesting for another reason. If Spencer's mill was not completed by September 1927, (although we may assume that he was cutting at least some commercial logs by that time) and if Wilson Hart took it over that year, then Spencer must have operated the business for only a very brief period. This theory is supported by another press statement, made just three months later in December that year, which claims that the milling industry was extremely slack, that several mills were closing—including, as we have seen, the Skyring mill at Kinbombi siding—and that Spencer, rather than cutting timber at Elgin Vale had already moved into the logging side of the business and was supplying logs from Goomeri to one of the main sawmills at Maryborough.[9]

A biographical report concerning the life of T.H. Spencer, written in 1930 and subsequently published in the *Maryborough Chronicle* reveals some details of the man. The report claimed:

> One of Goomeri's most interesting personalities is Mr T.H. Spencer, timber merchant and commission agent. Although practically only a recent arrival in the district, Mr Spencer has interested himself in any movement that has had as its object the welfare of the town and district and many bodies today owe their success to his zeal and energy. A keen business man, gifted with great foresight and possessing a wide experience gained in several walks of life, Mr Spencer has brought his knowledge to bear on many subjects affecting



One of T.H. Spencer's crawler tractors. The man standing behind the blade is presumed to be Spencer's French mechanic.

Source—Vic and Dulcie Wilson

this rural centre, and his advice and assistance have always been fully availed of.

A native of Bundaberg, Mr Spencer received his early education at Avondale, a little to the north of his home town, and upon leaving school he became associated with the grazing industry. He saw service in many places in the Burnett district, including Monto, Mulgoldie, (Mulgildie) and Canindah.

However, 'T.H.' as he is familiarly known to his many friends, was destined to make his mark in the timber world, and today he is a recognised authority on any subject pertaining to that industry. His first experience in the timber line was gained at Nerang in the Tweed district. Leaving there he turned his attention to the contracting side of the industry, and for some time carried on business as a building contractor in Maryborough. Misfortune here (dogged) ... this worthy citizen, the fire demon intervening and Mr Spencer was burnt out. Possessing those qualities of grit and courage, so marked to many of the nation builders of earlier days, 'T.H.' undaunted, went to Gayndah and purchased a sawmill there, which he successfully conducted for 12 months. (In fact the mill was rented). He then transferred his

activities to Biggenden, and after residing there for some five years, he again 'packed his bag,' this time for Sefton. Here Mr Spencer established an up-to-date sawmill, which was in operation for some five years.

About 1927 (in fact 1926) the Sefton mill was removed to Elginvale, better known as Scrubby Paddock, about 25 miles from Goomeri. This step was indeed fortunate for Goomeri, for it brought Mr Spencer into close touch with its affairs, and he soon made his influence felt. Unfortunately, the mill at Scrubby Paddock only worked at full pressure for about six months; owing to the slackness of trade it ceased operations, but the log timber is still being hauled into Goomeri, from there and Mr Spencer has established himself in an office in town.

At Scrubby Paddock Mr Spencer established quite a settlement. Realising that his employees' children must receive a sound education in order to make good in later years, he built a school at his own expense, and an arrangement was made with the Education Department to supply a teacher. This school is still in use today.

Progress always his watchword, he was quick to realise the advantages of motor transport, and that the day of the bullock waggon was over. Today he is using the most modern method for delivering logs to the railway—Linn Caterpillar tractors and a fleet of motor trucks. Thus much valuable time is saved, the motors making several trips in the time that it would take a team to do one journey, and costs are halved.

Mr Spencer's first entry into the public life of Goomeri was when he contested the Kilkivan Shire elections in 1927, and was returned ... As a councillor he has proved his worth. He was instrumental in convincing his colleagues of the value of graders for road-making purposes, and the necessity of purchasing one for each division. Previous to this the council only had one for the whole shire. These graders have since performed wonderful work, although much still remains to be done. Mr Spencer has spent hundreds of pounds of his own money in putting roads into a trafficable condition. A road that he has constructed through private property, on land leased from several settlers, into Elginvale, where his mill is situated—so as to avoid making a road around the edge of the hills as provided by the survey—will stand as a monument to his ability. Gullies have been filled in, and the road is well maintained despite the large amount of timber that is hauled over it. It is in striking contrast with many other roads in the area. Not only that, Mr Spencer has thrown this road

> open for everybody, and it is now practically a public right of way, although nothing is paid to him towards the lease or upkeep.
>
> As president of the Chamber of Commerce, a young body formed only a little over 12 months ago, he has played a prominent part in the building up of that organisation to its present standard. He has firmly stood by proposals which it has advocated, and under his capable guidance, the chamber has become a force to be reckoned with in district affairs.
>
> Mr Spencer is also connected with various sporting bodies, whilst he is also performing good work as chairman of the school committee. His name will long be remembered in connection with the growth of Goomeri.[10]

As may be seen from this report, Spencer was motivated by progress and was deeply involved in helping to better conditions within the timber industry and to ensure that the infrastructure was laid so that the industry could grow. He was also something of a philantropist, his endeavours to have a school opened at Elgin Vale and his construction of a road to the mill, a road he allowed the public to use free of charge, is testimony to his dedication.

The state of the roads through to Elgin Vale had long been a subject of contention. Evidence of this may be seen in the minutes of the Kilkivan Shire Council for 1917—nine years before Spencer established his mill there—in which the council responded to a complaint received from Porters Ltd concerning the road. The minutes read: 'Resolved overseer report at next meeting on the state of the roads through Manumbar and Elgin Vale as complained of in letter from Porters Ltd.'[11] The following month, after being moved by Councillor John M. Leahy and seconded by Councillor Samuel H. Glasgow, the council decided to carry out the necessary repairs.[12]

Yet whatever repairs or construction work had been carried out at that time it was evidently not substantial, for in February 1926, even as Spencer was in the act of planning his move to Elgin Vale, the Porters were again complaining that the road was in a poor state. The minutes of the Kilkivan Shire Council reveal that the council was then considering a letter: ' ... From W. Porter, Elgin Vale, Manumbar drawing attention to the very bad state of the roads in that division and requesting that something be done immediately otherwise all vehicular traffic will be blocked.

'Moved Cr Perrett, seconded Chairman (W.B. Lawless) that the matter be left over until next meeting.'[13] This letter was written before T.H. Spencer had begun his construction of the mill at Elgin Vale and appears to indicate that the

roads were being very badly cut about by the bullock wagons and trucks that were then carting logs to the railhead at Goomeri.

Yet the depression years of the industry during the 1920s evidently affected Spencer greatly, the mill at Elgin Vale being unable to be economically maintained despite the vast forestry reserves, and forcing Spencer to remove his business operations to Goomeri where, in addition to maintaining the contract to supply timber to Elgin Vale and to transport sawn logs from the mill to Goomeri, he also dealt in full logs, transporting them to other mills at places such as Maryborough and Brisbane.

The move to Elgin Vale had been something of a gamble for Spencer, and he quickly realised that this was so. One has only to look at the sharp increases in the costs of timber at that time to know that timber sales must have been somewhat depressed. In 1915 the cost of rough Queensland timber was nineteen shillings and sixpence, by 1926 when Spencer moved his mill to Elgin Vale that same timber was fetching forty-six shillings and sixpence. Imported timbers were far cheaper and builders were obviously favouring these less expensive imports. Evidently this was not a good time for anyone to be considering a strong future in the South Burnett timber industry, which is perhaps more surprising that Spencer, at that time, should have such confidence in the industry's future that he was prepared to pay for the rights to log ten million superficial feet of timber from the Manumbar region, and construct a mill which would cost him £12,000.[14]

One of the direct descendants of the Porter brothers, the two men who originally selected Elgin Vale from Manumbar, is Douglas Porter, the grandson of James Porter, a farmer who still lives at Elgin Vale. Mr Porter remembers the first days of the mill's operations, he was one of the first children to attend Spencer's school, and indeed, the first teacher at the school boarded with Douglas Porter and his family. During an interview conducted at Mr Porter's Elgin Vale property, 'Telopea', on the afternoon of Monday 4 December, 1995, Douglas Porter recalled:

> I remember there was a lot of noise (from the mill) and there was a loud whistle, you could hear it from miles away, people could hear it from five or six miles away, there was a fair bit of noise with the saws running. The timber was brought from not far back into the pine scrubs, and they were hauled into the mill and the logs nearly rolled themselves down, one man with a brush-hook, just by hand they would roll them down into the mill. The original mill, the Scotty Ross mill, was around beyond the school building, there's still part of the old boiler lying there ... the other side of the creek, about one hundred yards from the school ... There were quite a few families living there (at the village of Elgin Vale), and at the weekends they'd

> get away to the towns to get their supplies, Goomeri or Nanango, in those days the roads were not bitumen.[15]

Spencer owned the mill at Elgin Vale for only a short period, selling it to Wilson Hart at Maryborough in 1927, although, as we have seen, Spencer maintained the logging contract to provide timber to the mill, and according to the centenary report of the Wilson Hart company, published in 1965, Spencer: '... continued to operate the mill for the company.'[16]

This company, originally Wilson Hart and Bartholomew, was a long established sawmilling enterprise. Its pioneer owners, Andrew Heron Wilson, Robert Hart and John Bartholomew, were businessmen from Scotland who set up their first mill on the banks of the Mary River at Granville in 1866. It began cutting its first logs in May the following year. During the floods of 1875 the swollen Mary River was responsible for extensive damage to the mill and James Bartholomew was drowned.[17]

Like the mill at Elgin Vale, the Wilson Hart mill was also to experience the scourge of fire. The original Wilson Hart mill had been destroyed in 1881 with a total damage bill of approximately sixteen thousand pounds.[18] The mill was rebuilt on the opposite side of the Mary River near Queen's Park, Maryborough. It burnt again on Sunday 10 November, 1934, with a damage bill of approximately thirty thousand pounds. At that time it seemed, for a while at least, that the mill would not be rebuilt. Insurance premiums for sawmills were extremely high and most mills were under-insured. However, the directors decided to rebuild and the mill manager, Mr J. McIlwraith, was sent to America to purchase the latest milling equipment.[19] During the time the mill was out of action some of the men employed at Maryborough were transferred to Elgin Vale where they worked shifts around the clock. To those who still remember that time the period when the Maryborough men were resident at Elgin Vale was certainly the busiest in the mill's history. Extensive stands of pine were purchased by the Wilson Hart company in the Goomeri district in 1936.[20] Apart from his continuing interests in the mill at Elgin Vale and his contract to supply timber to it, in 1930 Spencer also had a general commission agency business in Goomeri, selling store cattle and real estate. In April that year he was advertising in the *Maryborough Chronicle* that he had: 'Properties for sale of all description, full list on application.' Some of the properties he was advertising were as far away as Gin Gin, and Biggenden.[21]

The Wilson Hart company was compelled to close the Elgin Vale mill in 1930; it was a considerably depressing time for the people of Elgin Vale, as the closure of the mill meant unemployment for the entire work-force. Additionally, the timber-getters and teamsters who were then supplying the mill were left without an outlet for their logs.

Another detailed account of the mill was published in April 1930. This report is interesting for it allows us a glimpse of the mill and its operations. The report claimed:

> The mill at Elginvale or Scrubby Paddock was established about three years ago by Mr T.H. Spencer. It was previously situated at Sefton, and then removed to Elginvale. Later on it was sold to Messrs Wilson Hart and Coy., Ltd., of Maryborough, although Mr Spencer still retained a substantial interest in it. Today, owing to the depression in the industry, this mill is idle, but log timber is still being obtained by Mr Spencer from the forest there, and it is being hauled to Goomeri and railed both north and south. It is doubtful if a more suitable site for a mill could have been chosen anywhere. It has been constructed at the bottom of a rising slope at a point where it drops very quickly, thus allowing the floor of the mill to be built up and plenty of room is provided underneath for the boilers, etc. Above the mill on the gently rising slope thousands of feet of log timber can be stored and easily rolled down to the mill as required. At one stage when the mill was working at full pressure over 10,000 super feet of log timber was to be seen on this area. The mill itself is a most modern structure. The plant is steam driven, the steam being obtained from two large boilers underneath the building, which are fired by the sawdust from the mill, whilst only the very latest machinery is installed. One particularly noticeable feature is that all the belts have been totally enclosed, affording absolute protection to the workmen from any danger of that sort. The mill is capable of handling 15,000 feet of timber a day, but, unfortunately it was only able to work at full pressure for a short space of time, when the acute trade depression made itself felt, and the mill was forced to close. Today it presents a deserted appearance with little stacks of sawn timber here and there to remind one of its palmy days, but it has been left in such a condition that within the short space of a week the wheels could once again be turning and industry in full swing. All descriptions of timber as required were cut by the mill during the time that it was working, and one particular item was 150,000 butter boxes for the Maryborough butter factory. Quite a settlement was established at this centre by Mr Spencer when he commenced sawmilling operations. A boarding house was built, barracks provided for the men, and a number of small cottages erected—about eight of which are in use today by remaining timber-getters and their families. A school was also built and a teacher

provided by the Education Department. This is still in use today, about 14 children attending ... The latest methods of transportation have also been introduced in the district. Mr Spencer is still hauling timber from Scrubby Paddock, and for this purpose he is using a fleet of powerful motor trucks and two Linn Caterpillar tractors, each fitted with a trailer. The Linn tractors are the last word in timber transportation and were put into use by Mr Spencer about two years ago. At first they were not a satisfactory proposition but Mr Linn, the American manufacturer, then paid a special visit to Goomeri to inspect the machines. He brought certain new parts with him and put the tractors into thorough order. Since then they have worked fairly well, and, although a large amount is spent in service upkeep, they have enormous advantages over the old bullock team. Whereas the bullock team would bring in about three logs on a trip, the Linn tractor with trailer carries 13 logs and more, or approximately 9500 feet. Time, too, is a great factor. Carting from Scrubby Paddock a bullock team would take from a week to a fortnight to do one trip, while the tractor does three trips a week, and can still work no matter how wet the weather, for it throws its own track down first and then crawls over it. The road is not damaged nearly to the same extent either, for the Linn's wheels have a breath of 14 inches and merely flatten the road down, making a smooth track for a car to run over afterwards. Costs are practically halved, being about 3/- per 100 super feet compared with 7/- per 100 with the bullock team, while the logs are always freshly cut and not allowed to turn blue while waiting to be sent away. Mr Spencer also operates a number of Republic trucks, while the timber from Manumbar is also carried to the station on motor waggons.

Mr Spencer first went to Goomeri in October 1927. In November, 1927, he sent away 380,000 feet of timber for the month, and for two years his wages bill amounted to between £3000 and £4000 a month, about six railway trucks being loaded every day. Since the depression commenced he has only been consigning 150,000 to 160,000 feet a month, and his wages bill has dropped to within the vicinity of £800. The hope is generally expressed that some relief will immediately be given to the industry, and that it will once again boom in the Goomeri district.[22]

The report was accurate, the timber industry was to experience another boom, but not for many years, and by that time the mill at Elgin Vale had experienced the worst of the depression.

Over the years there has been considerable confusion regarding the date when the Elgin Vale mill was sold to Wilson Hart at Maryborough. In their book *Wilderness to Wealth,* Murphy and Easton make no mention at all of the sale, stating only that Elgin Vale was home to one of the ' ... largest sawmills tapping the Manumbar timber belt.'[23] Other publications and reports have given the date as 1946, but as the above report, written in 1930 clearly demonstrates, the mill had already changed hands at that time—although Spencer, according to a number of subsequent reports, certainly retained the logging contract to the mill. A press report dated 1965 provides the following information: 'The mill at Elgin Vale in the Nanango District was the second mill erected on the site. The original mill on the site was shifted from Sefton by its owner, Mr T.H. Spencer in 1926. It came completely under the control of Wilson Hart and Co. Ltd. in 1927. The mill was destroyed by fire in May 1944 and a new mill was erected by October that year. There are 10 employees and the cartage contractors, Summers and Zwisler, (also reported as Swizler) employ three men in the yard. The mill can handle logs 30 feet long with a girth of 130 inches. Mr G.R. (Dick) Collard became manager on February 19, 1954.'[24]

A report of the timber available along the Manumbar belt, the timber from which the Elgin Vale mill was to extensively operate, was written in 1928 and this report claimed:

> Though quantities of timber are also available from private properties in all parts of the district, the other important source of pine supply is the Manumbar Range country, outside Goomeri, on the Maryborough—Nanango line. The Manumbar timber industry is almost self-contained, as the pine logs, felled on the ranges, are delivered directly to the mills in the vicinity, and are cut and dressed or converted into plywood ...
>
> In the South Burnett district the chief source of timber wealth is the Manumbar Range. Manumbar is an area of mountain ranges that extends out from the Burnett. The summits of the mountains are crowned with towering pine trees, which are outlined sharply against the sky. It is officially estimated that this region possesses at least 120,000,000 super feet of pine.[25]

Realising at last that the excessively high royalty rates were crippling the industry and making Queensland timbers less competitive against the

inexpensive foreign imports, in 1930 the Queensland government moved to solve the problem by placing a tariff on all imported timbers. This move was, at first, seen as a positive step and likely to produce a large number of employment opportunities within the industry. However, as soon as the American producers were informed of the tariff, they reduced the price of their timber by the same percentage, thus allowing the timber to arrive in Australia for the same pre-tariff price. It was a significant blow to the timber industry of the South Burnett, many of the mill owners, timber-getters and teamsters quickly realising, T.H. Spencer among them, that in the face of such aggressive marketing techniques, the local trade appeared to be doomed.[26]

An account of the region's timber reserves written in 1930 gives us some indication of the state of the industry at that time:

> Queensland has been blessed with a wealth of natural resources, and one of the most important is her timber supplies. Millions upon millions of feet of valuable timber have been removed from her forests in past years, representing a great deal of wealth, until today the Provisional Forestry Board has commenced to ration what remains of the standing timber in order to conserve it for a greater number of years, while silvicultural operations have been commenced to replenish the State's supplies. However, owing to the trade depression and the huge importations of foreign timber, the timber industry is languishing throughout the State. This is greatly reflected in Goomeri, which is the centre of a large timber area, and one of Southern Queensland's largest softwood forests.
>
> Great softwood reserves, consisting mostly of hoop and bunya pine, are held by the Forestry Board at Manumbar, Elginvale, and the surrounding district, all within a radius of 30 miles of Goomeri, but only small portions are sold and allowed to be cut. The Forest reserve at Manumbar consists of about 10,000 acres, the reserve adjoining about 10,000 acres, and that at Elginvale or Scrubby Creek 7660 acres, while in the opposite direction to the north there are large areas of timber at ... Daddy Marine, (Dadamarine) and Fawley. Several years ago employment was provided for a large number of men at those centres, but nowadays not half of the original number are in work, and stagnation is rife throughout the industry. This has naturally had its effect in the town of Goomeri, the railhead for these places.[27]

Within two years the government had come to understand that it was the royalty charges more than any other single factor that was so badly damaging the timber industry. In October 1931 state royalties were reduced and now that local mills could compete with the foreign imports the timber industry began to rapidly grow.[28]

For the people who worked in the timber industry, the decade of the mid 1920s to mid 1930s was one of the worst periods ever experienced in the industry's history. Not only did those people have to cope with the wide ranging impact of a world-wide depression, but they were compelled to come to terms with a depression within a depression—that forced upon them by the Queensland government over its policies of restricting timber reserves, exceedingly high royalty rates and inappropriate tariff schedules. With all these problems to contend with, it is little wonder that T.H. Spencer could no longer continue operating the mill at Elgin Vale. However, by the mid 1930s the outlook for the timber industry had decidedly brightened. With more liberal government policies the markets for timber were opening up and large shipments of various types of logs were being sent to the mills, both locally, interstate and overseas.[29] Not only was the industry in a state of ascent, but the reafforestation schedules placed into practice over the previous fifteen or twenty years were beginning to prove that the state could and would have a sustainable timber industry, and these reafforestation measures were themselves giving employment to many hundreds of people.[30] The precise date of the re-opening of the mill at Elgin Vale is not known, however, in 1936 the press reported: 'The local men were looking forward to the reopening of the mill, but it is now certain that nothing will be done in this direction until after the annual meeting of directors in July ... '[31]

Chapter Four

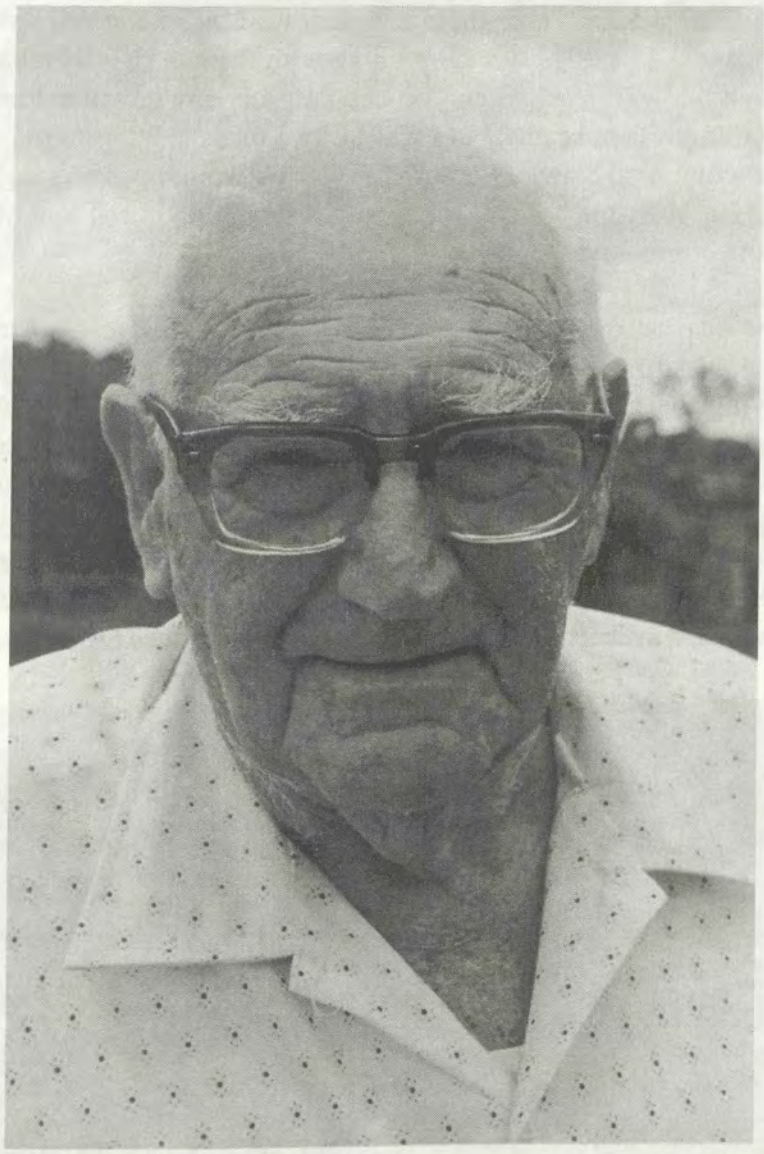
Spencer Sub-contracts His Duties at Elgin Vale

T.H. Spencer sub-contracted the haulage job of supplying timber to the mill at Elgin Vale during the latter part of the Second World War. No record of this sub-contract exists, in fact it appears to have been a gentleman's agreement, but according to the sub-contractors, Jim and Thelma Knipe, this probably took place in late 1944 or 1945. Today Mr and Mrs Knipe still live in Goomeri and they were interviewed for this history on the morning of Friday 8 December, 1995.

Jim Knipe was operating a cream run from Mondure to the Wondai butter factory when a job became available at Woolooga during the 1930s. Hyne and Son's sawmill at Maryborough had purchased a large quantity of private timber in the Woolooga region and they were looking for a contractor to haul the timber into the Woolooga railway yards. Mr Knipe states:

> Well that just suited me, I sold my cream run, it was only a light two ton truck, and slipped down to Brisbane and bought a heavy International truck and started log hauling hardwood. It didn't turn out too good at the time, and at that time the Forestry Department was throwing open a lot of pine. It was during the 1930s when this timber was thrown open, Planted Creek was the first timber they threw open. We stayed there until the timber was finished, about three years, it didn't last long out there. I was the first to introduce diesel powered trucks to this area, these Commer trucks came out with a Perkins engine, and I thought I'll try one of these and it turned out very good, very cheap to run.[1]

While hauling timber from Planted Creek (on the Gayndah Road) to the Goomeri railway yard, Mr and Mrs Knipe lived in the bush, their house a modest construction of canvas and timber. Mrs Knipe cooked on a wood stove, a rainwater tank provided water. Following the cessation of logging at Planted Creek the Knipes worked in various areas, finally sub-contracting to T.H. Spencer to supply logs to the mill at Elgin Vale during the Second World War. At that time there was a labour shortage caused by military recruitment, although timber workers were exempt from conscription. This was one of the reasons why Spencer was forced to hand over the haulage rights to a sub-contractor.



Jim Knipe, who took over the contract to supply logs to Elgin Vale from T.H. Spencer. Photograph date December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

Jim Knipe recalls:

> I was lucky, I had a few older men, they were too old to go into the army, they wouldn't take them and they were good enough for the scrub work. I managed to keep going with them ... It was a battle through the war years when you couldn't buy any new machinery, everything was so scarce, but I was lucky, I managed to get hold of a big International crawler tractor, a TD 18. I'd been supplying logs to the Elgin Vale mill for two or three years by that time, I had other tractors doing the job too.[2]

The new International tractor, certainly the pride of the Knipe business fleet at that time, was first used in pulling logs from the scrub to the loading ramps for supplying the mill at Elgin Vale. Mr Knipe recalls that there were then about twenty-two men working at the mill and he had trouble supplying sufficient timber to the mill, as the men were cutting some 12,000 superficial feet of timber each day. Jim Knipe recalls:

> If we had a week's wet weather they'd catch up to us and they'd have nothing to do, it was a big responsibility, when they were

This TD18 tractor was purchased by Jim and Thelma Knipe in 1945 when they took over the log supply contract from T.H. Spencer.

Source—Jim & Thelma Knipe

Truck loaded with a number of logs. 1943 model L.H. drive Mack, army release.

Source—Jim & Thelma Knipe

Jack Brown with his dog on top of the log, the logs are going to the Goomeri mill.

Source—Kilkivan Historical Society

> employing over twenty men, to keep them in work. Spencer had sold his mill but he kept the contract to supply the mill with logs, and then when the war years came on he was a pretty hard man to work for and nobody would work for him, and he called on me to take it (the contract) over from him. So I hopped into it and kept the place going. I bought a tractor and a truck (from Spencer), three thousand pounds worth off him, a big Caterpillar D 7 tractor ... and the contract went with it.[3]

The construction of roads into the various logging areas was generally the responsibility of the contractor or sub-contractor. This was often an arduous and expensive operation requiring heavy machinery and the expenditure of much time and manpower. Jim Knipe recalls: 'We had to do everything, build our own roads, the government would make a small allowance, but it was very small, about threepence per hundred superficial feet, it didn't cover it but you just had to do it. In those days the tendering (for logging rights) was very keen, there were a lot of contractors about looking for work, they'd work for nothing half of them ... Once you took on a job you had to do it all yourself.'[4] Jim Knipe ran three bulldozers and a grader and was responsible for cutting many roads into the scrub.

T.H. Spencer, of course, also held a financial interest in maintaining the roads in good order and he did so for many years. However, by September 1947 he believed that it was time for the Kilkivan Shire Council to take over the major part of the responsibility of maintaining the Elgin Vale road and he wrote to the council to inform them of this. He quoted the example of the Manumbar mill which was then paying just ten pounds per year for the upkeep of a private road from the mill to the surveyed road at Manumbar station. He pointed out that this road was used by only one ratepayer—the owners of the Manumbar mill. Spencer said that a similar agreement should be reached between himself and the council, claiming that his road was used by many ratepayers in the region and that it had always been maintained at his own expense. Spencer suggested that he subscribe a similar amount, ten or twelve pounds, for the maintenance of the road, and that the council would then grade the road at least once per year.[5]

Spencer's suggestion was evidently received with some enthusiasm, as a letter to the Kilkivan Shire Council written by Spencer dated March 1949 accompanied his cheque for twelve pounds, being payment of his obligation for the maintenance of the road at Elgin Vale.[6]

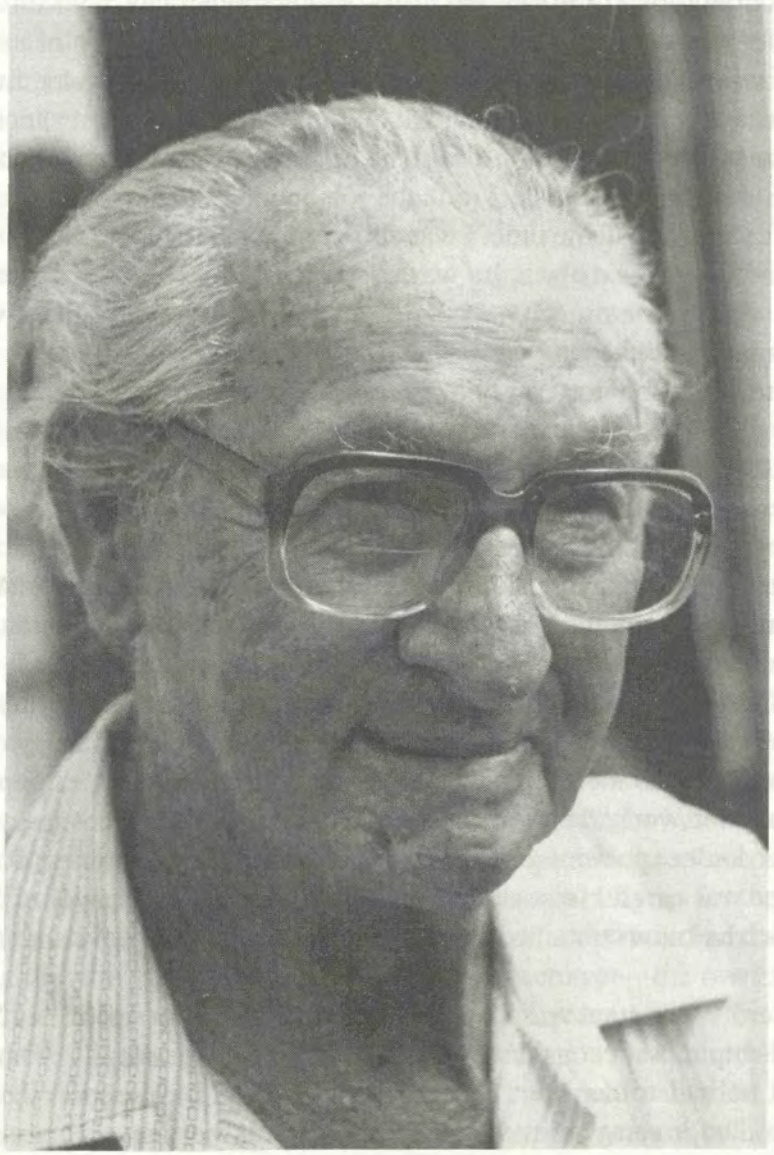
Contractor Jim Knipe continued to supply logs to the Elgin Vale mill from the date he took over the contract from Spencer until 1952. All the timber

supplied to the mill was pine. He had a total of twenty-seven men working for him, timber-getters, tractor drivers and truck drivers who worked at supplying timber not only for Elgin Vale but also for Manumbar and other mills and for trucking logs to the railway yards at Goomeri. At the cessation of his contract the work was taken over by the company of Summers and Zwisler, from Many Peaks, near Monto. Mr Knipe claims: 'When I left he, (Spencer) couldn't get another contractor to work for him so he had to surrender his contract so these people (Summers and Zwisler) took the job on direct then from Wilson Hart. I worked for Spencer all the time, I was sub-contracted to him ... He just thought he was the boss of the place, he was a big bloke and he was chairman of the shire council and he owned half the houses in Goomeri and the sawmill out Dadamarine way and another sawmill at Elgin Vale and he was a very big bloke, he thought he was daddy to everybody.'[7]

Despite this seemingly harmonious relationship, Jim Knipe found Spencer difficult to work for and claims that at times he was dishonest, particularly over the payment of logs. There was also an occasion, shortly after the commencement of the sub-contract, which created a rift between the two men, this was caused over payments for workers' compensation insurance. According to Jim Knipe, the argument was caused because Spencer had previously stated that he had a policy which covered not only Jim Knipe but also all the men who worked for him, but when the premiums became due Spencer withheld money owing to Jim Knipe and stated that it was to be used to make the payments. Jim Knipe recalls: 'One month I had a very big pay coming and he stopped £1200 off my pay for workers' compensation. He said, "You've got to insure your men, you don't expect me to do it do you?".' A stormy argument ensued and Jim Knipe was careful to stand between Spencer and the drawer of Spencer's desk which he knew contained a revolver. The dispute was never harmoniously resolved.[8]

Spencer's accountant was David Trudgian, a man who controlled Spencer's financial empire with considerable dexterity. Jim Knipe recalls: 'Dave was all right but he had to do what Spencer told him.'[9] Like Spencer before him, Trudgian died leaving no records of the business he was so instrumental in controlling.

One of the men who worked hauling timber for Jim Knipe was Jack Brown, also of Goomeri, who was interviewed for this history on the afternoon of Friday 8 December, 1995. Mr Brown had previously been working supplying cut timber from his wood depot in Goomeri to Brisbane for two guineas a ton—work, which in his own words, was: ' ... not paying salt.'[10] Realising that the venture would not provide a living, in about 1941 or 1942 Mr Brown approached Jim Knipe for work and was put on the payroll as a timber truck



Jack Brown, timber truck driver who worked for Jim Knipe supplying logs to the mill at Elgin Vale. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

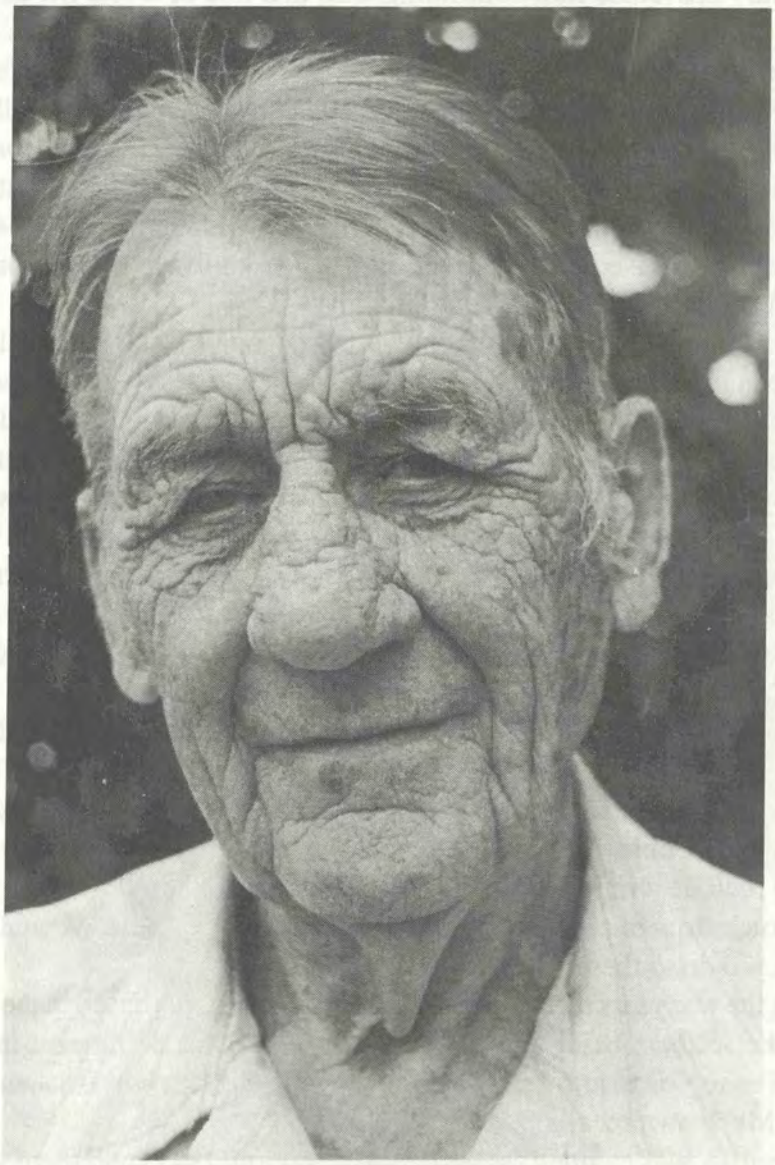
driver. He remained with the Knipe organisation for two and a half years until a back injury prevented him continuing with that line of work. Mr Brown had previously worked as a bullock team driver, starting with the teams when he first came to Goomeri in 1932, working to get logs from the scrub for Ross's sawmill at Goomeri, the same company that had built the first sawmill at Elgin Vale.[11] According to David Trudgian, Spencer's accountant, the Ross mill at Elgin Vale was originally constructed by three men William (Scotty) Ross, George Wieland and Frank (Frederick) Wright. It was later (circa 1914) moved to Goomeri and subsequently burned down. The mill was rebuilt, on a small scale, and later changed hands several times.[12]

The transformation from animal power to mechanical power in pulling logs from the Manumbar and Gallangowan scrubs occurred over a long period. The practice of snigging logs by bullock teams dated back to colonial settlement of the region, later, bullock teams were still used to drag the logs to loading ramps where they could be rolled onto trucks for transportation to the mills. Eventually, however, these teams were replaced by crawler tractors and other forms of powerful mechanical equipment. As this transformation took place there were frequent altercations between the traditional bullock drivers—who believed that the mechanical processes were threatening their livelihoods—and the new breed of timber-men, those who drove the tractors.

Jack Brown recalls: 'This is going back to 1923, (before the mill at Elgin Vale was established and when Spencer was operating from Sefton). The trucks had just started then, solid tyres, and they'd come up the range. There was a terrible lot of trouble. The old bullockies would sometimes tie their bullocks up on the road, leaving them standing on the road so they'd mess on the road, and the truck drivers couldn't get up, they'd just slip. There were all sorts of things they'd do to these truckies, they hated them.'[13]

During the war years there were many army contingents based in the Goomeri district, the soldiers being put through training before being sent into active service. The region also formed part of the now well known Brisbane Line of defence. Mr Brown recalls:

> The army was camped around here then (circa 1942) and there were army trucks everywhere. I think there'd be seven or eight thousand men around this district, tank corps and Bren gun corps, I think the 16th Division and the 19th were here. There was a tank corp at Manumbar. While I was working in the timber we'd go from the mill or from our camp and go out all weekend. You couldn't get men to work in those days (because of war recruitment) and the ones who worked in the mill during the weekdays were required to go out to get timber at the weekends. Well sometimes the army would train on Saturday and Sundays too, and we'd be up in the scrub and they'd



Vic Wilson, former number one benchman at Elgin Vale.
Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

> start firing. One day in particular I had the team up in the scrub and the next thing these bullets were hitting the trees, so we got out fast ... They were firing mortars and they set the paddock on fire just a bit away from us.[14]

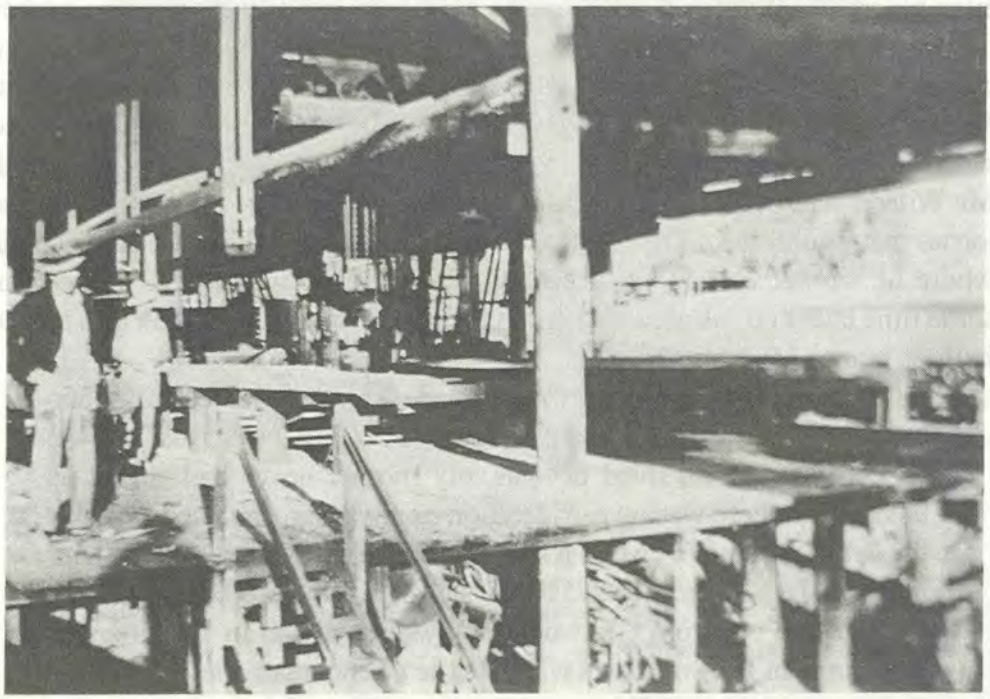
Jack Brown remembers the first day he carted logs into the mill at Elgin Vale. He recalls that it was a clear fine day and they managed to get two loads of logs to the mill that day. There was also another point that he clearly remembers: 'How I can remember that particular day so well is because there was a chap named Baxter, he was working with the Forestry and he was the roads foreman. They put this little creek crossing in and cemented it and it came down so steep that when we used to go in the logs used to hit on the other side as we were going out, and we called it Baxter's Mistake. I remember the first loads we brought across there, we dragged the back of the logs on this culvert ... It was German Gully.'[15]

One of the mill hands who remembers the mill before it was destroyed by fire in 1944 is Vic Wilson, who now lives in Toowoomba and has remarkably clear memories of both the mill and T.H. Spencer. Mr Wilson started in the timber industry as a boy, indeed his entire family once worked at cutting logs, even his mother, Louisa, worked on a saw. He started mill work in the timber industry at Eudlo where his father, Jack Wilson, had a bullock team and a contract to supply timber to the mill. When his father moved his team up to Manumbar the family, including three brothers, Melville, John and Cecil, moved with him and Mr Vic Wilson went to work cutting pine for the Manumbar mill. Mr Wilson senior was paid a contract fee to drag logs from the scrub to the lorries that would take the timber to the mills. Vic Wilson later moved to Gunalda where he worked in another mill, returning to Brim's mill at Gallangowan some time later and subsequently returning to scrub work to cut the logs for the bullock teams. Mr Wilson recalls:

> I cut pine then with the brother, you see I had my father and other brothers, they were all in the pine too. This is how we started off, we all cut pine, we all lived in tents, my mother never had stoves in those times there was no refrigeration or anything, she used to make the cakes in camp ovens. She used to come and help cut pine with us because she was pretty good on the saw. My mother, her mother and father came out from Germany, they were married in Toowoomba and buried in Toowoomba. I wanted to be a benchman, they got bigger money, and I thought I'd go from mill to mill until I get that job. We moved to Manumbar (soldier) settlement and we all cut pine there, that would be back in about 1935 or 1936. I stopped there for about

six or seven months at Manumbar settlement, and then I shifted and that's how I came to work for Mr Spencer. I went up and saw him and he told me he'd give me a job so I shifted down (to Elgin Vale) and that was sometime in 1937 and I put in a couple of months I think it was, we were put up in the scrub and he (Spencer) had to get three or four miles of gravel, in the scrub it was black soil and the trucks would bog so we had to gravel it. We went to old mines, the people there looking for gold years ago had big mullock heaps and we picked up all the stone and gravel and put it on the truck and did the road through. The mines were about three miles up in the scrub. I worked in the sawmill after that, (Spencer) gave me a job cutting timber on number two bench.[16]

Mr Wilson recalls that the mill was closed during the depression years and that he first went to work there when the mill reopened after the Great Depression when Spencer apparently was managing the mill for Wilson Hart. The foreman working at the mill at that time was Ned Currie who had previously worked for Spencer in one of his other mills. According to Vic Wilson Mr Currie was the



Western side of mill, Mr Vic Wilson, number one benchman standing left of frame.

Source—Vic and Dulcie Wilson

Railway logging yard, Goomeri 1944, during strike
Source—Irene Coleman, taken by David Trudgian

Goomeri 1940. F. Coleman's Leyland truck with a load of sawn timber from Elgin Vale.
Source—Irene Coleman

first foreman to work at the mill when it reopened following the depression.[17] Mr Wilson has fond memories of T.H. Spencer whom he describes as a 'true gentleman,' adding: 'He treated me well, I cut my thumb with a saw and he took me into the doctor, twenty-five miles into Goomeri, that's where he had his head office, and we had tea at the cafe, and we went back to the mill and he asked me was I going on compo and I said "No", and he said, "Oh well you've got plenty of grit", and I worked on.'

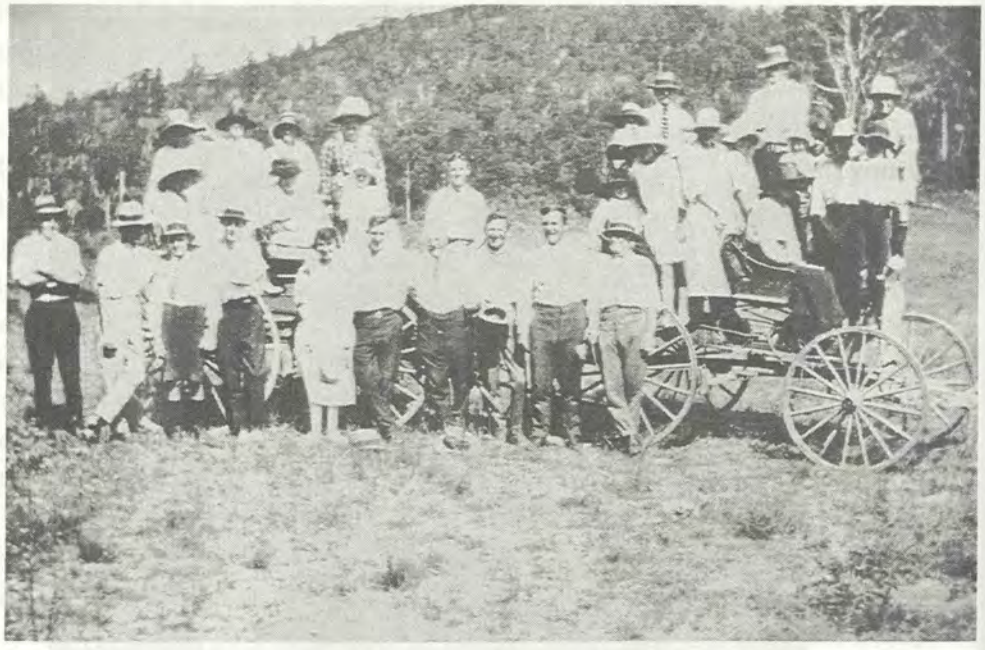
Mr Wilson claims that several months after he started work at the mill Wilson Hart took over the management of the business, although they had, of course, owned it since 1927. The first manager under this arrangement was Sid Laxton. Vic Wilson was then moved from number two bench to number one bench, the position he had been attempting to gain for several years. Mr Wilson recalls: 'It was a fairly big mill and we put a good production through there. We put through 19,000 superficial feet in one day and that was a record then, back in about the middle of 1938.'[18]

While Spencer sub-contracted his responsibilities for hauling log timber to the mill, he retained his contract to haul sawn timber from the mill to Goomeri. One of his principal drivers was Frank Coleman, also of Goomeri. Frank Coleman worked initially in the trucking industry with his brother-in-law. He died in 1985, but his widow, Mrs Irene Coleman, who lived close to the Elgin Vale settlement until 1941, recalls: 'He didn't do much from the scrub to the mill, but most of his work was from the mill to Goomeri, he brought the timber into Goomeri from the mill and at times he would do two trips a day. But when we would have (rail) strikes, which happened occasionally, he would take it from Elgin Vale through to Wilson Hart's at Maryborough.' Frank Coleman carted timber from the mill at Elgin Vale for approximately fifty years.[19]

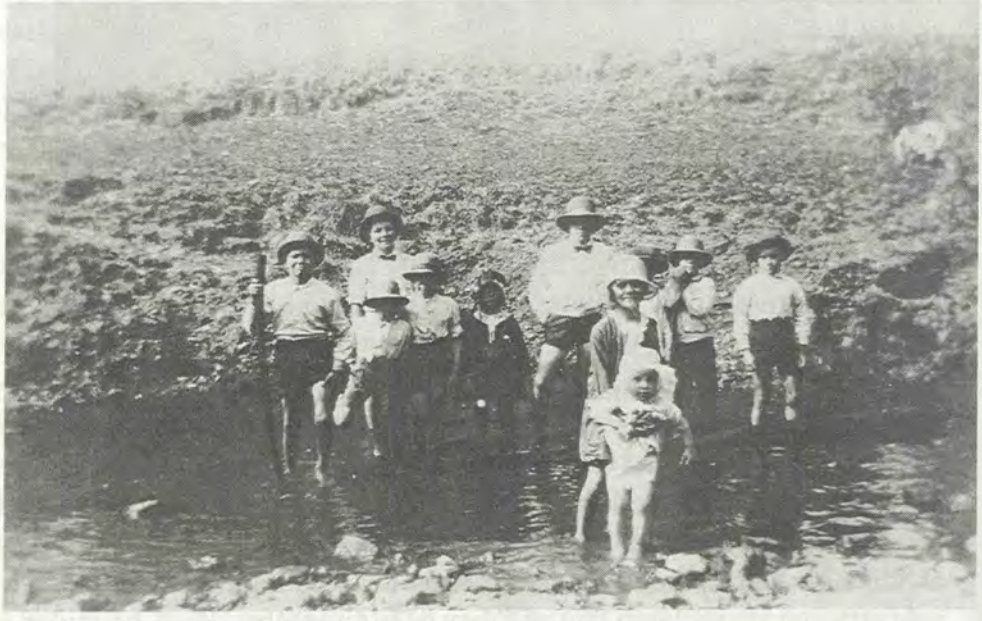
Mrs Coleman's home near Elgin Vale was part of a property through which T.H. Spencer had to originally drive his road through to the mill site. Before the coming of the mill the area was a quiet rural region rarely disturbed by any outside influences. The Boxing Day picnic was the highlight of the year, families gathering at selected areas of Scrubby Paddock, bringing with them their baskets of food and drink. Mrs Coleman remembers that Spencer approached the owners of the properties through which he wished to drive the road and she recalls that he was an imposing man. 'I remember that this was the T.H. Spencer from Sefton ... He was a thick-set man, with glasses, he wasn't popular, the reason why he wasn't popular is that he came in and started things going and sometimes older residents can be like that, they resented it ... He was a great man for roads and he spent some of his own money on bringing the roads up to date. But he was just a man who wasn't liked ... (When he came to our property) he just told us what he was going to do and he asked if he could get the freeway

Frank and Irene Coleman, taken in the Rockhampton Gardens, circa 1953
Source—Irene Coleman

through the property, and there again people didn't like him coming to Elgin Vale because they thought he was going to cut up the country, it was the same as it is now with some of the landholders not wanting roads put through their property, it was similar to that and they didn't want that. Well, he said in return



Scrubby Paddock. Moonda Waamba Creek—Early '20s
Source—Kilkivan Historical Society



Moonda Waamba Creek, 1 January, 1931 Elgin Vale
Source—Kilkivan Historical Society

A picnic at Elgin Vale with the original sawmill in the background. The date of this photograph is unknown but was probably sometime during the 1930s.
Source—Ruth Porter and Douglas Porter

(for permission) he would carry the mail, so for quite a while we got our mail through the trucks, whatever trucks came through.'[20]

Mrs Coleman recalls that Elgin Vale was the social centre of the district and she often attended parties, dances and tennis afternoons there. Sports facilities were few, but there was a tennis court and a cricket pitch. The court was situated on a piece of flat ground belonging to Douglas Porter, below the village closer to the creek. The cricket pitch was situated farther away, also on a piece of vacant flat ground belonging to Mr Porter.[21]

Chapter Five

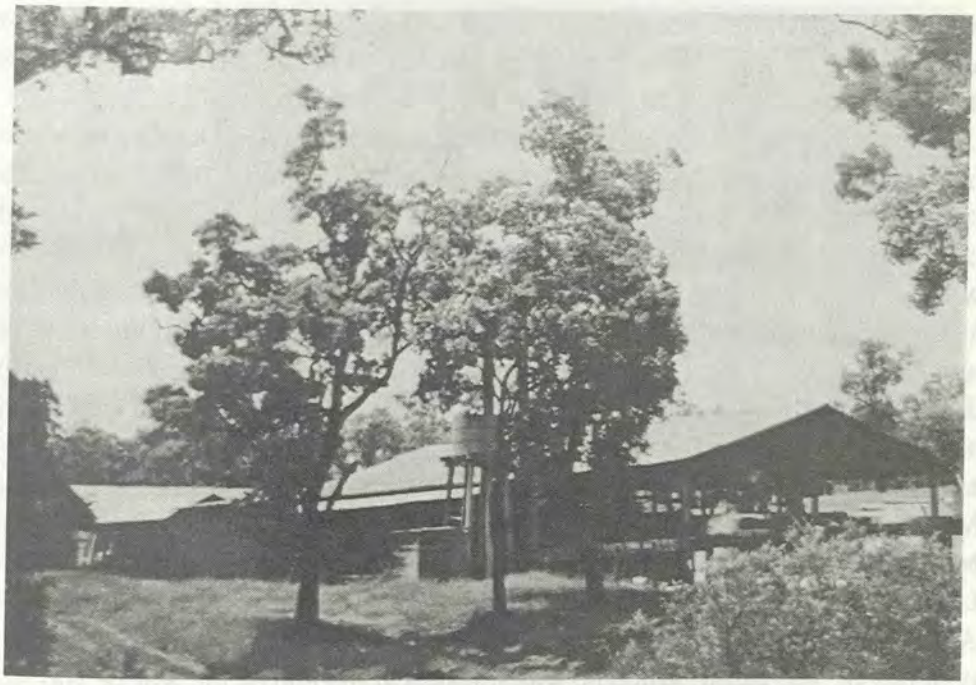
Life at Elgin Vale

Prior to the arrival of the mill in 1926 the small rural community at Elgin Vale was comprised mainly of farmers, their families, and occasionally employees of the selectors—those who could afford such luxuries. It was an isolated community largely out of touch with the outside world, news arriving infrequently, no mail system, telephones unheard of. Yet the arrival of the mill was the genesis of a more populous community, it brought life and prosperity to the region. Mrs Irene Coleman recalls: 'It brought the population first of all, and then they started to get types of entertainment going, that was actually the change that affected us.'[1]

However, what was life like for those men, women and children who lived and worked at Elgin Vale? Even with the mill in operation it was still a relatively isolated existence, but no more isolated than life at most other rural communities. As we have seen, there were several cottages and houses situated close to the mill, some of which are still standing, a boarding house, a barracks for the single men, a school, a small store, a galley, or cook-house, and a hall where dances and other social functions frequently took place.

Former mill worker Vic Wilson recalls that men living in the barracks during the 1930s would eat at the boarding house, Spencer would charge the men £1 each week for this service, the money being deducted from the men's wages. The food was prepared by a female cook, and Spencer would sometimes send to the farms for wagon loads of vegetables—especially pumpkins and potatoes. The cook later married one of Spencer's pine cutters. Mr Wilson recalls that the food was wholesome and nutritious, but that the kitchen was infested with cockroaches. He claims: 'I've seen them that thick they used to fall down among the sausages. I went in there (to the kitchen) to say good-day to the cook or something, and I saw all these cockroaches and a big frying pan of sausages and I saw them dropping in there.[2]

During the war years the men employed at Elgin Vale, being timber workers, were exempt from compulsory military service, but they all had to take a medical check and register for service in case the call-up was later extended to timber workers. This military registration took place at the recruiting centre in Goomeri. Former mill hand Vic Wilson was living with his family in a shed on the banks of the creek when he first heard the news that war had been declared. He



Elgin Vale timber mill. Date unknown.

Source—Irene Coleman

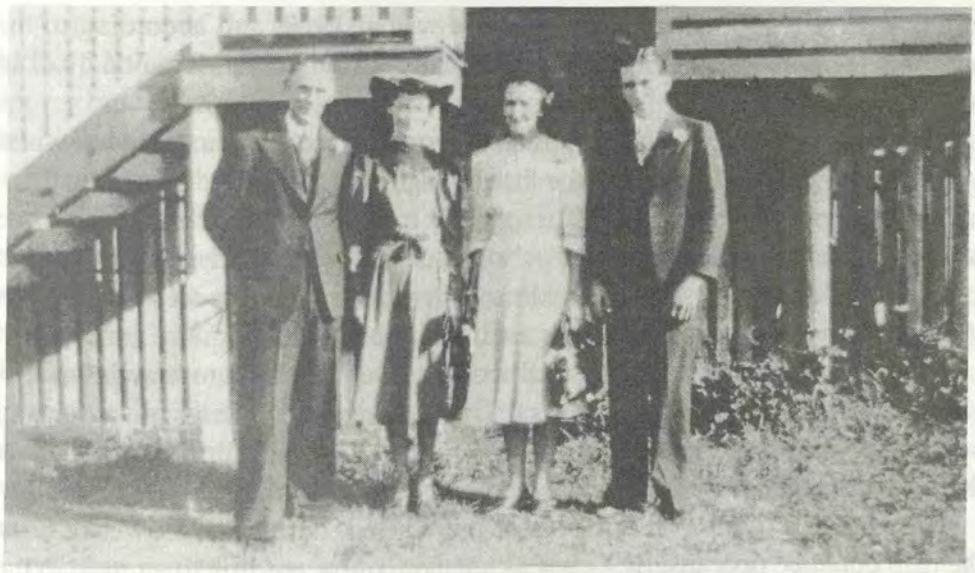
Elgin Vale. Date unknown.

Source—Irene Coleman

remembers that he had been playing poker with some of the men in the barracks and when he returned to his home that evening he put on the radio to listen to the announcement that Britain was at war with Germany.

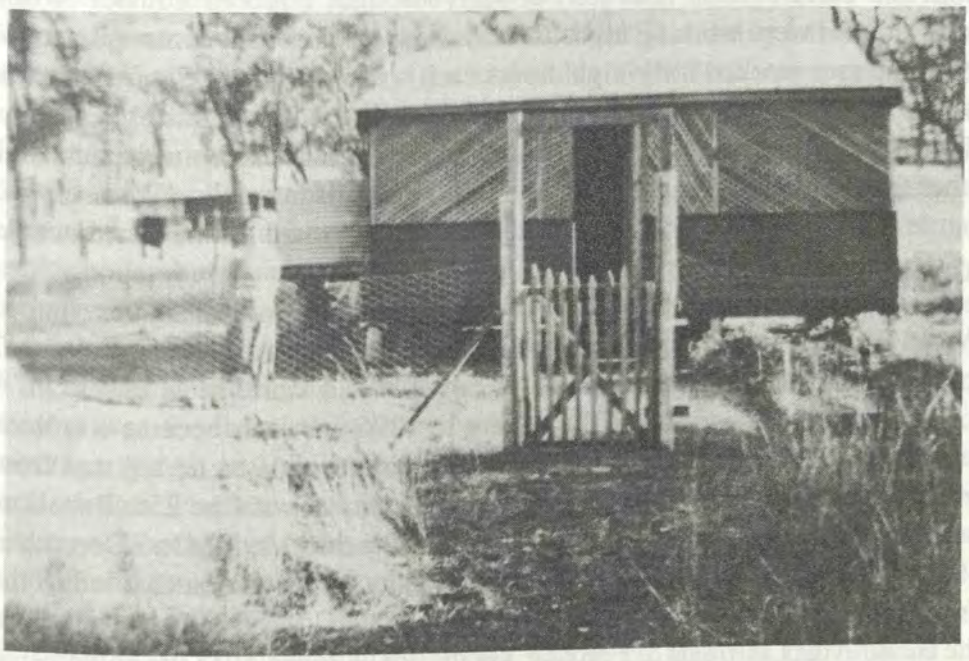
Some of the men working in the mill at that time included Des Crane, whose family also managed Spencer's dairy property at Elgin Vale, Jack Thomas, the engine driver, who later moved to Brisbane, his son, Lew Thomas, also an engine driver, Frank Stegman, his brother Eric, Eric Franz, Roy Veritz, who worked on the boarding frame and later became the mill manager, Des Kennedy, a young man who worked on the planing machine, Ellis Hockey, tailer-out on number one bench, Ben Love, a benchman, Ted Eisentrager, from the Kingaroy district, Wally Hay, Jim Heron, Hermy Kerr, the brothers Sid and Vic Laxton and Jack Hurt. Vic Laxton was a powerful man who, at Elgin Vale, was popularly known as 'Tarzan'. Ray McIntosh worked for Spencer as a pine cutter, Bob Manthey worked at the mill as a stripper and later joined the police service, Merv Holden worked as a tailer-out and also later joined the police force, Dave Laney from the Darling Downs was a timber cutter who later joined the Australian Army. He was captured by the Japanese and spent the war in a prisoner-of-war camp. When he was released at the end of the war he was in a particularly poor physical state. Harold Peel was machinist at the mill, George Nichol was a number two benchman who came from the north of England and whose father was a mine manager there. Dudley Smith, more commonly known as 'Digger', worked as a stripper in the timber yard, and 'Lucky' Cecil Nolan worked in the mill. Stan Duel, Doug Smith and his son Neville were all truck drivers working for Spencer. T.H. Spencer's nephew, Les Spencer, also worked in the mill during the 1930s and 1940s—he later married and moved to Brisbane. Chris Israel, reported as having been a German Jew, was once foreman of the mill but, according to various descriptions recorded for this history, he was not well liked by the men and his attitude created serious problems, some of the men leaving to seek work elsewhere. Arthur James Hoey worked as a clerk in the mill office, according to Vic Wilson he was a relative of the author Arthur Hoey Davis, more popularly known as Steele Rudd, although Mrs Doreen Hoey, the widow of Arthur who now lives in Maryborough, is not aware of any relationship to the famous author. Arthur Hoey was later transferred to the main office of the company at Wilson Hart's in Maryborough. He finally became the manager of the retail produce and hardware store, Denhams in Maryborough, a position he retained until his death in 1972. Also working at one time in the Elgin Vale office was Madge Locke, the daughter of mill manager Dick Collard.[3]

Richard (Dick) Bembrose, one of the men who worked at the tailer-out position on the number one bench at Elgin Vale, immediately volunteered for



Arthur Hoey on left standing beside his wife Mrs Doreen Hoey.

Source—Mrs Doreen Hoey



One of the houses that once stood at Elgin Vale. This house was occupied by Arthur Hoey and his wife Doreen. The caption on the back of the photograph states: 'My first home, Elgin Vale, 1942'.

Source—Mrs Doreen Hoey

military service following the outbreak of war in 1939, and according to his number one benchman, Vic Wilson, was later killed on the Kokoda Trail in New Guinea.[4]

Additionally there were many itinerant workers, more commonly known as swaggies, who would walk into the little village, ask for work and remain there for a while until they moved on. These men's names are not recorded and some of them were there for such brief periods that the other workers rarely got to know them. Most of these workers were not given the more responsible positions in the mill, but were employed in stacking timber in the yard.[5]

During the war much of the mill's output was directed to war industries work. Benchman Vic Wilson recalls that the mill put through large volumes of wood that were sent to the band saws at Wilson Hart's in Maryborough where they would again be milled for the construction of ammunition boxes.[6]

The numbers of men working at the mill varied, during the slower seasons the mill could be operated by as few as ten men, but according to a report in the *South Burnett Times* of July 1987, far more frequently twenty men were employed there and at one time, when the Maryborough men were brought from the burnt Wilson Hart mill at Maryborough, a record number of one hundred men were working night and day. It was a close knit community, until 1946 the men worked forty-eight hours each week, including Saturdays, with Sunday being a day of rest—at least when the mill was not working to capacity. The work was hard, dangerous and dirty and there were few mechanical aids other than the steam engines to run the saws. Vic Wilson recalls: 'We never had a guard behind the saws in those times, and if any board hit the saw, it would ... (fly up) and go through you.'[7]

In 1947 came the death of one of Elgin Vale's legendary figures, that of World War One veteran David James Adams. Following his death in July 1947 the *Nanango Advocate* headlined: 'A Hero of World War One Marches On.'[8]

David Adams was born in Bundaberg in 1896 and later became a bullock driver in the Murgon region. When war broke out in 1914 he enlisted from Murgon in the first A.I.F. and became a Lewis gunner with the 25th Battalion, later being awarded the coveted Distinguished Conduct Medal. On 2 December, 1919, the *London Gazette* published an account of the action that led to the award: 'No 5892, Lance-Corporal D.J. Adams, D.C.M., during the attack on the Beaurevoir Line, east of Péronne. On the 3rd October, 1918, he volunteered to go with Sergeant Cox and together they rushed an enemy post containing three machine guns and about 50 enemy. He carried the Lewis gun and during the advance used it from the hip, firing so accurately that the enemy fire was kept down. Together these two non-commissioned officers captured the enemy post and killed ten of the enemy. Showed fine courage and did splendid work.'

At the end of the war Adams was repatriated to Australia and once again took up bullock driving, this time in the Blackbutt region. He stayed there for approximately twelve months and later moved to Elgin Vale where he worked his bullocks for eleven years. During his time at Elgin Vale he became a much respected member of the community and was involved in many community events, after a further nine years working at Manumbar with the bullocks he was forced to give up such strenuous work due to medical problems associated with injuries he received during the war. He was described as being a quiet, unassuming man, a good sportsman and dancer who was always cheerful. Following his death, aged just fifty-one years in July 1947, he was given a service at the Nanango Presbyterian Church, many of his old war colleagues attending. His coffin was draped with the Australian flag and his pall bearers were his brother, Jack, and three of his comrades. He was survived by five brothers.[9]

Another well known and liked Elgin Vale identity was Amy Elizabeth Sorensen, who lived at the village for more than twenty years. Mrs Sorensen was born at Bundaberg and prior to moving to Elgin Vale she lived with her husband at Murgon and Kilkivan for several years. Her husband had also previously worked a bullock team on Fraser Island. The family arrived at Elgin Vale in 1946 and after the death of her husband in 1949 Mrs Sorensen continued to work as a housekeeper. Towards the end of her life she experienced severe ill health and moved to Goomeri. She died at the Nanango general hospital on Tuesday 31 December, 1968.[10]

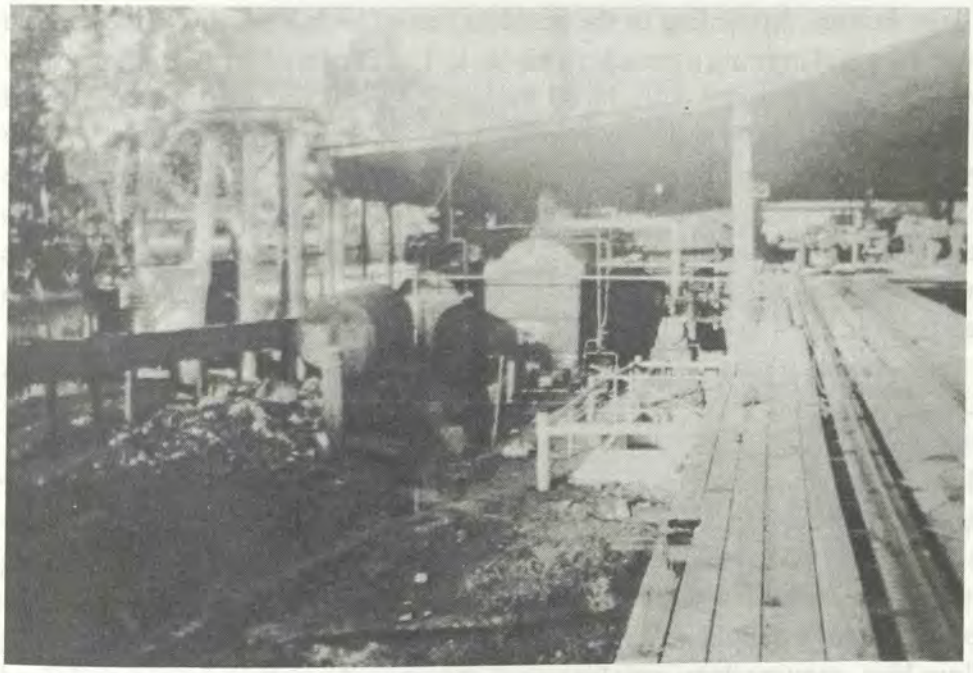
In winter the mill at Elgin Vale could be comfortably warm, a result of the nearby boiler, but in summer work under the corrugated iron roof was usually excessively hot and uncomfortable, especially when there was no breeze blowing. There were, of course, few modern facilities, electricity did not arrive at Elgin Vale until the mid 1960s and even then the mill continued to run on steam power, the electricity was used at the mill for lighting only. There was no sewerage system at Elgin Vale and no reticulated water. Toilets were simple earth closets. Food and other supplies had to be brought in by truck from Nanango, Goomeri or sometimes Kilkivan. There was no rail service, no bus service, and travelling to the nearest township was, at least in the early days, accomplished infrequently. The residents of Elgin Vale did not have any medical facilities, those requiring such attention had to be taken to the hospital at Nanango, there being no hospital at either Kilkivan or Goomeri—although a small cottage hospital was later established at Goomeri, one of the driving forces behind the establishment of this hospital being T.H. Spencer. There was little in the way of a communication system at Elgin Vale, other than the regular

William Otto Schultz and his wife Eileen M. Schultz
Source—Mrs E.M. Schultz

mails and a telephone at the mill, newspapers arrived late, the mail and groceries were delivered to the small community by the cream carrier three times a week.[11]

Sporting facilities at Elgin Vale were scanty, although there was a football team which was a member of the South Burnett Rugby League Association, its Elgin Vale representative appears to have been Mr M. McCallum. A report of April 1935, describing a meeting of the association, claimed: ' ... that there were applications (for membership) from Blackbutt and Elgin Vale for affiliation ... (and) it appeared that Elgin Vale had a pretty good team, having some Maryborough men.' The application was approved at that meeting, although its Elgin Vale representative admitted that: ' ... having no gate (grounds) they would not want many home matches.'[12]

Housing conditions at Elgin Vale varied, according to marital status or one's position within the company. The manager's house, which can still be seen today on the rise to the south-west of the mill and overlooking the mill complex, was certainly the most prestigious. Next to this was the tally clerk's house. This was once occupied by a man named Bill Schultz who later died at the mill. Graham Knight recalls: 'Bill Schultz was killed here ... there was a tractor that took waste timber out near the big bluegum tree (on the western side of the



Western side of the mill showing boilers and engine. Note the pier and tracks leading to rubbish tip. This is where William Otto Schultz was killed.

Source—Vic and Dulcie Wilson

mill) and he took a trolley out there and must have lost his balance and fell off the end and was killed. He was a tally clerk here for years and years, he used to work in the Wilson Hart operation, he worked in the yard as tally clerk, he would tally everything that came in and out.'[13] The date of this accident is recorded in the mill's register of accidents and shows that Schultz was killed at 1.30 on the afternoon of 22 September, 1972, (details of which appear in Appendix One). The entry in the log is painfully brief, describing the site of the accident as the 'rubbish pier', the cause, 'unknown (fell)', and the results, 'fatal'. It had been an unfortunate day for accidents at the mill, at 8.30 that morning Kevin Robert Dow had been badly injured when he slipped at number one bench and broke a rib on his left side.[14]

William Otto Schultz had previously experienced several accidents at the mill from 19 October, 1963, to 10 April, 1968, dates which also provide us with the information that he was a long term employee. His first recorded accident occurred at 10 a.m. on 19 October, 1963, in the case docking saw area when a twisting board pulled his hand into the saw, lacerating the third finger on his left hand to the knuckle. The second accident, which occurred at 7.30

a.m. on 28 May, 1966, happened while Schultz was working on one of the village houses. According to the accident record he fell off the ladder onto a piece of wood injuring a muscle in his back. The third accident experienced by this man occurred at 2 p.m. on 10 April, 1968, while he was working at the planer, a chip flew up and hit him in the eye.[15] Following his death in 1972 the press only briefly reported: 'A 64 year-old married man was killed when he fell from a ramp at the Elgin Vale sawmill last Friday. He was William Otto Schultz, who is believed to have died as a result of head injuries received in the freak fall. Schultz was transported to the Nanango General Hospital but was dead on arrival.'[16]

Schultz was a long-time employee of the mill. According to his wife, Mrs E.M. Schultz, the family had originally been living at Gallangowan, during the 1940s, where William Schultz had been employed by the Forestry Department. The family, which then consisted of husband, wife and one son, lived under canvas, Mr Schultz working in the scrub. Later they moved into a modest house at Gallangowan that they rented from the department, subsequently purchasing a small house close by. In 1946 when Mrs Schultz went to Brisbane to have her second child, a daughter, William Schultz took up a position with the mill at Elgin Vale, moving there with his son, eight years of age, they were later joined by Mrs Schultz and her baby daughter after she was released from hospital in Brisbane. Schultz was to work at Elgin Vale for twenty-six years before his accidental death. After her husband's death Mrs Schultz was told by mill management to vacate the mill house where she lived and she moved from Elgin Vale to Blackbutt to reside near her daughter.[17]

There is, of course, no record of the injuries that have occurred at the mill since it was first constructed in 1926. One of the men interviewed for this history, Vic Wilson, lost a finger in the mill in about 1939. Mr Wilson recalls: 'I was clearing out a fan, a thing close to the saw and I slung my hand up and it just hit the tip of it and went straight down and it took it all off. They got the ambulance out and took me to Nanango then. The saw took it all off, there was only a bit of skin hanging and the doctor put the hard skin back over the top ... Another fellow got a piece of timber on number two (bench), it hit the back of the saw and it went straight through the bones of his arm, but he got over it and went back working there again. You just had to be careful all the time when you're working in a sawmill.'[18] Mr Wilson was off work for six weeks following his accident, he received forty pounds workers' compensation for the loss of his fingers but in some ways the accident was a fortunate one for him, while being cared for at the Nanango hospital he met a nurse named Dulcie and later married her. Vic Wilson brought his bride to Elgin Vale in 1940, after enjoying their week's honeymoon in the Maroochydore region. Furniture for

Log loading for the Elgin Vale mill.
Source—Ruth Porter and Douglas Porter

their home at Elgin Vale was purchased in Gympie during their honeymoon and was waiting for them when they returned to the village. They moved into Spencer's old house at the village on the far side of the hall. Comforts were few, the floor-covering was linoleum, cooking was by wood stove with a cast-iron frying pan, toilet facilities were primitive, a pan that had to be frequently emptied, its contents buried, there being no pan collection service at the village. There were, at that time, approximately one hundred people living at Elgin Vale.[19]

Workers' compensation claims for injuries at the Elgin Vale mill for the financial year 1972/73 were extraordinarily high—due to the pay-out the S.G.I.O had to make for the death of William Schultz. Claims for that year totalled $12,913.88. To put this in perspective, claims for the following year amounted to only $148.89, this being paid to E.N. Smith who, on 24 October, 1973, had strained his back muscles at the docking bench while moving a board to the roller.[20] The actual compensation pay-out to the widow of William Schultz was $12,000.[21]

The mill appears to have had an average record for safety, although there were numerous smaller accidents and some of these have been recorded in a

log, an industrial regulatory requirement, which was discovered at the original office of the mill during the research stages of this history. A letter from the Office of the Industrial Inspector at Maryborough, dated 22 October, 1962, was also found with this log, the letter provided the following instructions:

> Section 33 of 'The Factories and Shops Act' of 1960 provides as follows:
>
> 33. The occupier of a factory shall at all times keep in the factory in the prescribed form, or in such other form as may be approved by the inspector, a record in English (called the register of accidents) showing entered therein the prescribed particulars relating to every accident which occurs in the factory and which he has knowledge, and shall at all times cause that register to be open to inspection by any inspector.
>
> Any such occupier who fails to comply with any provision of this section shall be guilty of an offence against this Act.
>
> The Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops has asked me to ensure that such 'register of accidents' be maintained.
>
> I would appreciate it if you would comply with the requirements of this Section. The register should be kept in the prescribed form ...
>
> (Signed) Inspector of Factories and Shops.[22]

The log is a fascinating document that allows us to glimpse the dangers of working in a sawmill at that time, a mill with fairly primitive equipment and far from any comprehensive medical facilities. The first dates of the log are elusive, the person who entered details, presumably the mill manager, recording the first six dates only as 19th October, 30th October, 18th July, 3rd August, 19th August, without adding the year. The sixth entry gives the day as 3 March, 1965. From this we can only assume that the first date refers to 1963, and the third date refers to 1964. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the guidelines from the Office of the Industrial Inspector were dated 22 October, 1962 and the first entry in the log is dated 19 October, which was almost certainly the following year.

Only two people are known to have died at the mill, William Schultz, who, as we have seen, was killed in September 1972, and the other, a benchman named Justo, was killed by a piece of flying timber. The date of this occurrence remains unclear as there is no entry in the Registrar of Accidents. Mrs Coleman recalls: ' ... There was also a young fellow had an accident there, he was benchman ... and this shaft of timber came off and hit him, killed him, Justo was his name, there was a family of Justos there. Mr Justo (snr) owned a truck and the family lived there and the boys were working at the mill.'[23] Mrs Coleman

also remembers that the injured man had not been married and that the entire family was well liked and highly respected in the Elgin Vale district.[24]

Some of the mill workers appear to have been accident prone, although this is almost certainly due to the dangerous nature of the work rather than any supposed trick of fate. Emil Gustav Kerle, for example, had five recorded accidents at the mill, injuring his hands and face and at one time was taken by ambulance to the Nanango hospital for treatment.[25]

By 1975 the frequency of accidents at all their branches and country mills, and especially the rising cost of compensation insurance, was causing concern for the head office of Wilson Hart in Maryborough, and the development manager at that time, Ian McBryde, issued the following memorandum:

> Wilson Hart, Subsidiaries and Partnerships are undertaking a safety drive to try to reduce accidents in mills and branches; this has become necessary because of our growing awareness of the high accident rate in our industry (particularly in Queensland), because of a real concern for all members of our team and because of a savage escalation in the cost of Workers' Compensation Insurance.
>
> All of our Managers should be aware that every $1* claimed by our men for Workers' Compensation costs our company $1 in lost merit bonus. For example, the average claim in Maryborough, in 1974, cost us $252.
>
> A three pronged attack against accidents is being mounted this year:
>
> 1. Safety equipment and safety consciousness.
> 2. Providing safe conditions.
> 3. Accident follow-up, reporting and corrective action.
>
> The first part is being mounted immediately, with managers being made aware of what safety equipment is available. It is then up to the Manager to encourage the use of this equipment and instil into his men an awareness of the need for safe procedures.
>
> The second part and third part will be launched later, but Managers should take an immediate look around their plant for obvious hazards such as unguarded machinery, traffic hazards, unsafe procedures, cluttered walkways and areas where housekeeping is not up to standard. A quick look through accident records could be helpful in this regard. Don't be caught twice by the same hazard![26]
>
> *Assumed figure, original document badly damaged by silver-fish attack and this figure is obliterated.

Ian McBryde also issued a later memorandum warning mill managers to be careful that injuries outside the work place were not charged to the workers'

compensation policy, adding: 'Do not sign the form in the usual place, write on the form "I am satisfied that this injury did not occur at work, do not charge this injury against our Workers' Compensation Policy". This should be in large writing, preferably in red and signed.'[27]

Men working on the trucks carrying logs and sawn timber to and from the mill were also prone to accidents, although there is no record of the number of accidents suffered by the drivers or the men who worked with them. Frank Coleman, bringing sawn timber from Elgin Vale, suffered at least two reasonably severe accidents, the first occurred when the truck he was driving rolled in a creek, an event that resulted in Mr Coleman breaking several ribs and being admitted to the Gympie hospital. The second accident years later occurred during loading operations when he fell and broke his wrist. This accident resulted in him being off work for eleven weeks, his wrist in plaster while it healed. Mrs Coleman recalls of this event: 'When the accident occurred they sent another truck, driven by a man named Bob Crawford, out to bring Frank Coleman's vehicle into Goomeri. Well he too got knocked off the truck and broke his hip. And then we had a daredevil here who volunteered to go out and get the truck which by this time was thought to have had a jinx on it, but he got in all right, he brought it in, third time lucky.'[28]

The road from Elgin Vale to Goomeri has never been a particularly safe route, even today it remains a narrow track, gravel in places, along which the logging trucks travel quickly in order to maintain their schedules. The speed of the vehicles and the condition of the road have always been a factor in logging truck accidents.

Timber truck driver Jack Brown recalls an event that occurred while he was trucking timber to Goomeri:

> Any timber work is dangerous. In those days those little trucks were overloaded all the time, no trailer brakes, just relying on the truck brakes, and we used to come down some very long hills, and by the time you'd get to the bottom you'd have no brakes, you'd just be relying on your motor to steady you a bit, we were under-powered and overloaded. I had an old army Dodge truck, and it was a terrific truck to work but we used to overload it. You'd put as much on as you'd think you could get there but sometimes it didn't get there. My best mate, I killed him ... we went out ... into the scrub, I had all the mill hands with me, that night two of them stayed at the camp in an old tent, and I brought the other three and myself, we came back to town (Goomeri). I had a load on ... I was coming around this bend and my load slipped over onto the wheel and skidded me over a bank, I lost the load and everything. The truck never left the road but

Jack Brown's Dodge truck—two children standing on the truck—Kevin and Trevor.

Source—Kilkivan Historical Society

the load did. These three chaps up on top, two of them got thrown clear but the other bloke, he went under, under a log, and he was my best mate, Harry (Herman) Seiler, … we only had three to four logs on, side by side … I got out and was looking around for him and couldn't find my mate, and then I looked down and he was there, and we had to lift the logs off him, and there would have been sixty men (army recruits in training) standing around and not one offered to put him on the stretcher, anyway I put him on the stretcher, and he was so bad I rolled his head in a coat … then I had to get this fellow's brother from the scrub, it was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life, drive past where I had the accident and go and tell his brother, and then I collapsed when I got home.[29]

The *South Burnett Times* gave further details of the accident and of an accident that occurred coincidentally at the same time to Frank Coleman, then carting timber from Elgin Vale to Goomeri. The report claimed:

Mr Herman Seiler, aged 40, married, employed as a sawyer by Messrs

> Ross & Co., Saw-millers of Moore Street, Goomeri, met his death on Thursday last when, in company with John Brown (truck driver), John Humphreys, Bryan Manning and Dudley Wright were conveying hardwood logs from Mr Frank Hunt's property at Manumbar to the sawmill at Goomeri. Leaving Manumbar at 4.45 p.m. and proceeding 6 miles, the twitches became loose and were tightened up. After travelling two miles further both chains had broken and the logs rolled down an incline. Seiler, Manning and Wright who were sitting on the logs were thrown off, but Seiler was not fortunate enough to be thrown clear, as his body was found beneath a log weighing a ton. It could be seen that he was beyond human aid. A visiting doctor arrived at the scene and attended to Manning who was bleeding from a cut on the forehead, and to Wright who was suffering from shock, and were then conveyed to the Wondai Hospital.
>
> The funeral which was largely attended, left the Church of England for the Goomeri cemetery on Friday. The service at the church and graveside was conducted by the Rev. A.E. Ruether, of the Lutheran Church.
>
> What might have been a more serious accident happened on the Elginvale road when Messrs F. Coleman and G. Burrows were drawing a load of sawn timber from the Elginvale Mill to Goomeri railway station on Saturday morning last. When about six miles from Goomeri a car travelling in the same direction, when passing, the driver misjudged the distance and to avoid a collision Mr Coleman who was driving the truck, had to turn off the road. In doing this the heavy load of timber swayed and caused the bottom of the truck to lift and as a result the whole load fell to the ground. The two men in the cabin had narrow escapes from flying timber.[30]

There were little, if any, medical facilities at Elgin Vale, apart from some rudimentary first aid administered by mill workers' wives or the mill manager, and those requiring more serious medical attention had to travel to the nearest hospital at Nanango or Goomeri. However, hospital treatment was an expensive business and few Elgin Vale residents would have travelled the distance unless it had been an absolute necessity. In May 1935 several executive officers of the Nanango hospital visited Elgin Vale and convinced most of the mill workers, and presumably their families, that it would be beneficial for them to become contributors to the hospital fund. The Nanango hospital was then experiencing severe financial difficulties—at the time of the May 1935 report there were only two patients at the hospital with a resident medical practitioner and four

Loading pine logs for transport to Goomeri 1944. Crawler tractor pulling a log up onto a truck.

Source—Irene Coleman

Roll over of logs—Frank Coleman holding his broken ribs.

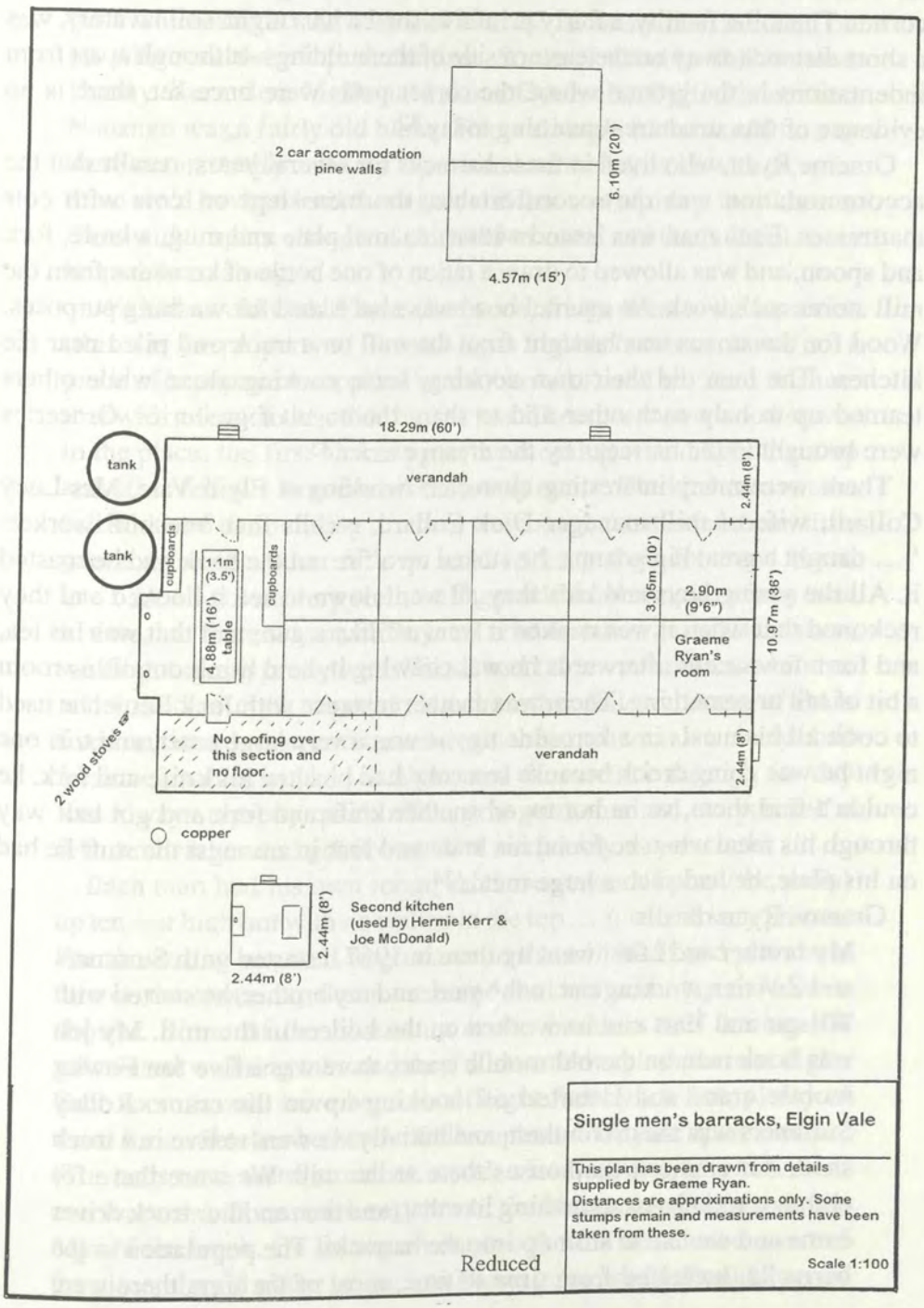
Source—Irene Coleman

nurses to look after them. The hospital delegation to Elgin Vale had informed the workers that if they contributed to a weekly scheme they could be cared for free of charge at the hospital and that consultations with the resident doctor would also be free. This was a considerable saving as one Elgin Vale mill worker had recently consulted the hospital doctor and had been charged ten shillings and sixpence for the service.[31]

As we have seen, the single men at Elgin Vale were largely accommodated in the barracks, this building was constructed on the slope to the north-east of the hall. The stumps of the building and much refuse can still be seen at the site. The building was quite a substantial structure with about ten private bedrooms, each running off external verandahs on the north and south sides. On the western side of the building was a large kitchen area where the men prepared their food. In this room two wood stoves were set into a single large recess, water was supplied by two rainwater tanks, there were food safes and a long wooden bench running down the centre at which the men prepared their food and later ate. Seating in the kitchen was provided not by chairs but by long benches, or 'forms' on either side of the table. On the north side of the barracks, approximately four yards distant, were two pine garages. At a similar distance on the southern side of the barracks was another small kitchen that

The rubbish dump near the site of the single men's barracks

Source—Author's collection



Single men's barracks, Elgin Vale

This plan has been drawn from details supplied by Graeme Ryan.
Distances are approximations only. Some stumps remain and measurements have been taken from these.

Reduced

Scale 1:100

also housed a wood stove, the remains of a 'Standard Dover' stove, plus numerous other remnants may still be seen near this location. The entrance to the barracks was on the northern side of the building, close to the western corner. The toilet facility, a fairly primitive shed with a night-soil lavatory, was a short distance away on the eastern side of the building—although apart from indentations in the ground where the corner posts were once set, there is no evidence of this structure remaining today.[32]

Graeme Ryan, who lived in these barracks for several years, recalls that the accommodation was quite comfortable, the men slept on cots with coir mattresses. Each man was issued with an enamel plate and mug, a knife, fork and spoon, and was allowed to draw a ration of one bottle of kerosene from the mill stores each week. An enamel bowl was also issued for washing purposes. Wood for the stoves was brought from the mill on a truck and piled near the kitchen. The men did their own cooking, some cooking alone while others teamed up to help each other and to share the costs of groceries. Groceries were brought to the barracks by the cream carrier.[33]

There were many interesting characters working at Elgin Vale, Mrs Lucy Collard, wife of mill manager Dick Collard, recalls that one mill worker: ' ... caught a great big goanna, he stoked up a fire out the back and he roasted it. All the young boys and kids they all went down to see it cooked and they reckoned that when it was cooked it went off like a gun, and that was his tea, and for a few weeks afterwards he was chewing it, he'd bring out of his room a bit of tail or something. There was another instance with Jack Beutel he used to cook all his meals in a kerosene tin, he was a very large eater, and this one night he was going crook because someone had pinched his knife and fork, he couldn't find them, so he borrowed another knife and fork and got half way through his meal when he found his knife and fork in amongst the stuff he had on his plate, he had such a large meal.'[34]

Graeme Ryan recalls:

> My brother and I first went up there in 1957. I started with Summers and Zwisler, working out in the yard, and my brother, he started with Wilson and Hart and he worked on the boilers in the mill. My job was hook man on the old mobile crane, there was a five ton Fowler mobile crane and I started off hooking up on the crane. Rolley Summers was the driver then, and initially we went to live in a truck shed, out amongst the houses there at the mill. We were there for eighteen months or something like that, and then another truck driver came and we had to shift up into the barracks. The population in the barracks fluctuated from time to time, most of the time there were

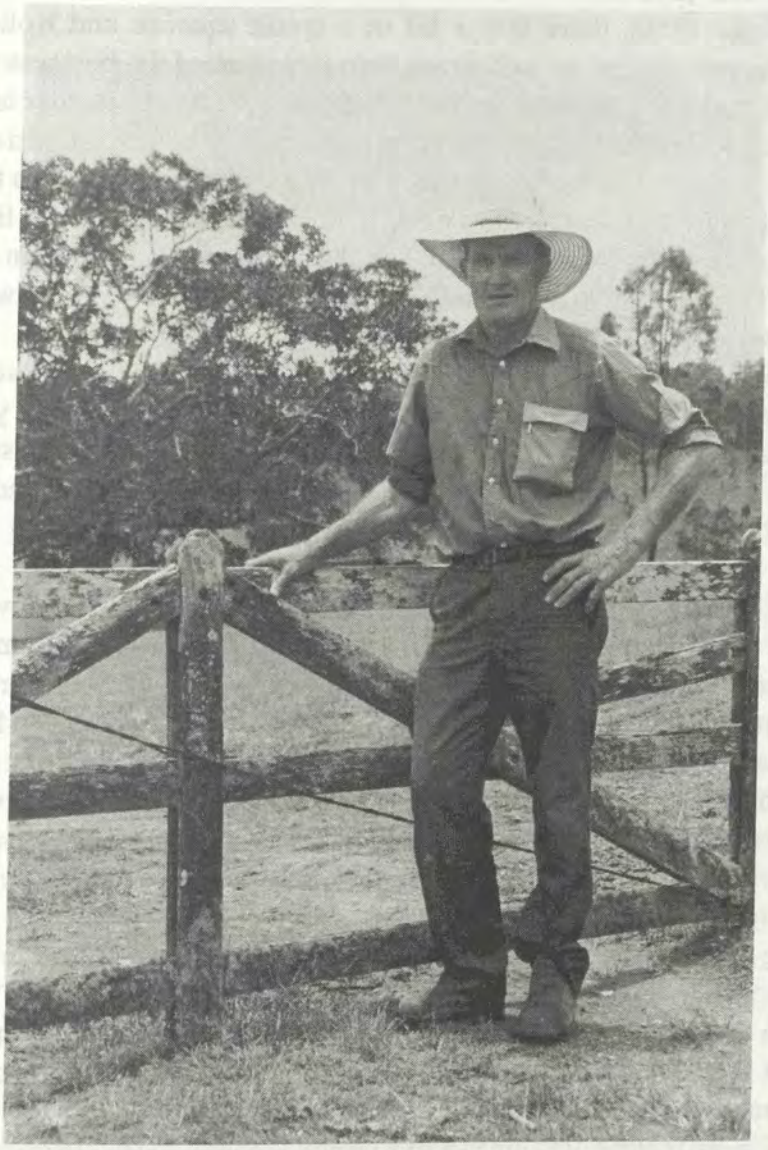
six or seven men there, ranging from old blokes down to teenage fellows like ourselves, the odd new Australian too, Mr Tarago Milanovitch, he was (one of) the new Australian blokes shifted there for a while, shared the barracks with us, he was a married man, but his wife was elsewhere at the time. Some of the older fellows were Hermy Kerr, Joe McDonald from Goomeri, Cyril Plater from Nanango was a fairly old bloke. The odd single bloke would turn up there occasionally and they'd put him into the barracks with us, quite often we'd have to lend them gear and that sort of thing, they'd come there with a spare change of shirt and trousers and that's about it, we helped them along.

We had an old Cold Flame (kerosene) fridge there in the barracks, (this was the property of Graeme Ryan and his brother and was not a piece of equipment supplied at the barracks) and we used to share that with a few of the other blokes too. There were two wood stoves in the place, the first blokes up in the morning would light them up and other fellows would work their way out ... The kitchen went the full width of the building ... there were some meat safes there, little gauze safes the other fellows used to keep their food and bread in ... We all got on very well, we'd get odd troublemakers from time to time, but there was never any real confrontation amongst the men, we all got along pretty well. We all had our own menus, the brother and I used to cook together, but the other fellows, some of them lived on tinned meat and tinned vegetables, whereas we always had fresh vegetables cooked at night, and dinner time through the day was always a pretty quick affair, you got home and cut yourself a few sandwiches and got it over with as quickly as you could.

Each man had his own room, each room was VJ pine (the walls) up ten feet high but with no ceiling in the top ... it was all very private. For showering we used to go down to the mill itself and you could turn on the steam tap down there and the cold water tap and have a shower. Some of the blokes up at the barracks had the big old galvanised washing tubs and they'd have their splash there at night. Each room would have been about eight feet by ten feet, plenty of room for a stretcher bed and a little cupboard for your spare clothes. (The beds were tester stretcher, wooden frame with a wire tester and coir mattress). There were very few of the blokes stopped there seven days of the week. On Friday afternoons there'd be an exodus out of the place, they'd either go back to Nanango or Joe McDonald would

go back to Goomeri, everyone had somewhere to go on the weekend. There were no laundry facilities there at all. In those times we worked five days a week. We had a pump-up tilley light and also a primus ... (After work) most of the lads would congregate on the bottom verandah, it was the coolest place, and anyone lucky enough to have a beer left over from the weekend would crack that and sit around until it got cool and we'd move into the kitchen then. Some of the early birds would start on their tea at a quarter to five, some of us other fellows would sit around until six o'clock or half past and then think about a bit of tea. There was another little building (on the southern side of the barracks) that was sort of a second kitchen. Joe McDonald and Hermy Kerr, two old fellows, that was their kitchen, there must have been a good stove there and they had a little table too, and that was their own private kitchen ... they didn't like cooking with us.

The residents in this district were serviced by a cream van, usually about a four-ton lorry, it came out, picked up all the cream from the dairy farmers along the road and when it got to Elgin Vale, the barracks was the central point, so he drove right in there to the front verandah of the barracks and on that front verandah there was a great big box, it would have been big enough to put a refrigerator in or something like that, it was quite a sizeable sort of box, and all the bread and the meat for the residents at the sawmill was unloaded into this box. (The cream carrier) used to run three days a week, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and that's how most of the fellows kept themselves up to themselves ... He was the cream van, he was the mailman and he was the paper delivery man too. In my time there it was Col Lucht, terrific people the old cream van drivers, there wasn't much they didn't do for the people in the bush in those days, it was a terrific service. He'd arrive at Elgin Vale sometimes at about half past four (a.m.) the latest he'd be there about half past five. And there was an old lady there, Mrs Kerle, Gus Kerle's wife, she'd always be there to meet him, and she'd have a cup of coffee for him, and if you were awake at about half past four or five o'clock in the morning at the barracks and you heard some lady talking you'd know it was old Mrs Kerle, she'd be down there sitting on the verandah probably talking to herself most of the time but she would always be there to meet Col. The usual procedure was, you'd roll up a sugar bag and put a ticket on it, whatever your order was, and throw that on with him one morning, say you threw it on Monday morning that would



Graeme Ryan, former mill worker. Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

come out on Wednesday … but it all came in a sugar bag, wrapped up in paper, and you fixed up the baker at the end of the month.

When I went there neither of us had a vehicle, we worked for a

> while and then my brother got a ute and that was our way around for a number of years.
>
> In the 1960s there was a bit of a credit squeeze and Rolley (Summers) shifted up to Builyan, into some part of the business up there, and left a foreman (at Elgin Vale), and we worked under him then, Eddy Barnes was our foreman then and he was the crane driver also. When we weren't using the crane we had to go down into the timber yard and do a bit of stacking, and as soon as we got some lifts that were ready to go out we'd start the crane up and shift them all out. There were two men bundling there, bundling timber to go away all the time, and it was quite a busy little place in those years.
>
> The manager of the mill, Mr Dick Collard ... he was a fairly grumpy old manager, he'd have a word with you if he thought you weren't doing the right thing. I think the men at the mill made sure they were always doing something when Dick turned up, you had to be seen to be doing something, not just standing about.[35]

Dick Collard began working at Elgin Vale mill circa 1945. He moved there from the Gallangowan mill where he had been employed as number one benchman. The manager of the mill at that time was Gus Reick. Mr Collard worked at Elgin Vale for approximately one year, but he disliked the foreman, a man named Chris Israel, and, after a while, he and a number of other discontented men left the mill. Collard moved his family to Brisbane where he worked as number one benchman in a sawmill at Geebung. About twelve months later Dick Collard received a letter from Wilson Hart's in Maryborough explaining that Chris Israel had left and asking if Mr Collard would consider returning to the mill at Elgin Vale. Mrs Lucy Collard recalls: 'We were building a little house at the time, I said to Dick, "I'll write the letter back", and we asked for seven pounds a week and house rent free. He was only getting five pounds a week (in Brisbane). He got word straight back for him to come back so he came back as number one benchman ... '[36]

Dick Collard originally came from a farm at Colinton, in the Brisbane Valley and it was there he met his future wife, Lucy, whose mother also had a farm in the region. Lucy's father had been killed accidentally circa 1926. The country had been parched by drought and Lucy's father had been cutting down an apple tree in order to feed his stock with the leaves, however, the tree fell on him and he subsequently died from his injuries. Lucy and Dick Collard were married at Toogoolawah in 1932. They lived for a while on a share farm at Esk and circa 1934 moved to Gallangowan where Mr Collard became involved in the timber industry, working initially at timber cutting and later for Brim's mill, finally moving to Elgin Vale where he was eventually to become mill manager.[37]

Dick and Lucy Collard on their wedding day.

Source—Lucy Collard

Dick Collard was a strict disciplinarian and would broach no shirkers at the mill and, in his private life, he had little patience for those he neither liked nor trusted. In 1936 he was involved in a fracas at the Manumbar hall, an event that

later led him to court, a conviction and a fine of nineteen shillings in lieu of one month's imprisonment. In July 1936 the press gave details of the case, claiming:

> At the Goomeri Police Court on July 16th before Mr F.G. Illidge, P.M., Albert Lane, as father of Aubert Albert Lane, of Manumbar (aged 16 years) proceeded against Richard Collard, also of Manumbar, for assault.
>
> Mr S.E. Gatfield looked after the interests of the complainant and Mr G.B. Roberts acted for the defendant.
>
> Evidence was given by Albert Lane, and then by the complainant who stated that on the night of a dance (May 9th) at Manumbar Hall, he and his brother had been called outside by Richard and Claude Collard. The former had said to him (Lane): 'What's this yarn you've been telling about us pinching your horses'? Witness (Lane) had replied: 'It's only what we have been told.' Continuing, witness (Lane) said: 'He then whacked me across the right side of my face and made my nose bleed, and at the same time said: "You're a ... liar". I stepped back and did not attempt to hit him.'
>
> In evidence, Constable Dornbusch stated that defendant (Collard) had said to him that he did hit young Lane at a dance, but was sorry for doing so.
>
> The defendant, in evidence, admitted hitting the complainant, whom he stated had, when accused as before stated, put up his hands in a fighting attitude and had attempted to hit him back. 'I am 27 years of age and weigh 13 stone.'
>
> After supporting evidence was taken from Ernie and Eric Franz the defendant was convicted and fined 19/-, with cost of court 6/- and witnesses' expenses £5, in default, one month's imprisonment in Brisbane gaol. Two weeks were allowed for payment of fine.[38]

Dick Collard was, in fact, fortunate to have lived to become the mill manager. On 23 December, 1939, he narrowly escaped with his life when he and many others were caught in the fire that destroyed the Grand Hotel at Goomeri. Dick Collard had been booked to stay at the Boonara Hotel close by, but due to a 'misapprehension' had slept in the foyer of the Grand and had been awakened during the night by the crackling of the flames and the screams of people as they desperately attempted to escape from the fire. Eight people died in the blaze, including one woman, Gladys Edwards, 24 years of age, who had been to a dance at the hotel that evening. She managed to throw her baby to Dick Collard who, by that time, had scrambled to safety, but Mrs Edwards turned back to rescue, Eileen Eisentrager, one of her friends, and, with Miss Eisentrager, was subsequently killed in the fire.[39]

Dick Collard retired from the mill in 1975 and died just four years later on 9 April, 1979.[40]

Buildings at Elgin Vale included cottages and what has been generally described as 'humpies'. Married men lived in these dwellings, and some of the married couples had quite large families, up to seven or eight children, with only one bedroom, a sleep-out, a kitchen and sitting area so it is difficult to know how these people managed for sleeping accommodation. All these buildings were constructed of untreated pine and were of a rudimentary design.

In 1964 one of these cottages was destroyed by fire, the *Nanango Advocate* reporting on 6 August that year:

> A tragic house fire occurred at Elgin Vale on Tuesday night, the 4th August, and as the result, a child lost her life when she was trapped in the blazing house and burned to death.
>
> The child, Janet aged 3½ years, was the second youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs Ian Conochie of Elgin Vale. Her father and Mr Vic Sokoll (also reported as Sokol) made several gallant and desperate efforts to rescue her, but to no avail.
>
> Shortly before midnight, Mr Vic Sokoll, a forestry worker, was returning home when he noticed flames and smoke issuing from the residence, owned and occupied by Mr Conochie and his family. He immediately raised the alarm and woke the family who escaped from the blazing building in their night attire.
>
> Mr Ian Conochie, aged 36, married, suffered burns to the face and hands, severe shock and was overcome by smoke whilst trying to rescue his family from the blaze.
>
> Mrs Barbara Conochie, aged 31, succeeded in passing their youngest child, Margaret aged nine months, through a window to safety.
>
> Their eldest daughter, Helen, aged 11 years, was also rescued. Mr Conochie was treated at the scene of the fire with oxygen by the Nanango Ambulance; and all four were taken to the Nanango General Hospital, where they were admitted suffering from burns and shock.
>
> Neighbours were quickly on the scene and helped to drag machinery which was in an adjoining building, to safety; but the house and its contents were completely gutted.

The manager's office at Elgin Vale was originally situated on the rising slope to the south-east of the mill and is still in existence, although it is now in a poor state of repair. The date of its construction is not known, but it was presumably built by Spencer when the mill was erected in 1926. Management of the business was carried on from this office for almost the

The original office at Elgin Vale, this structure was probably built by T.H. Spencer circa 1926. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

entire life of the mill. The office is constructed of two rooms, the smaller room on the north-west corner was used for administrative purposes, while the larger room behind it was used for storage. During the research stages of this history the office was thoroughly inspected and numerous documents were taken from it, including a rough diagram of the mill and surrounding village, drawn on cardboard, which, along with all other documents, has undergone preservation work and has been handed over to the Kilkivan Shire Council for safekeeping. A copy of the diagram is included with this history. On the eastern side of the office at a distance of twenty-three metres is a set of car ramps. According to former mill worker Graham Knight these ramps and a workshop were constructed by T.H. Spencer. A mechanic was once employed by Spencer to service his vehicles. The remains of the ramps and the beams that once supported a hoist can still be seen. A rubbish dump has now accumulated at one end of these ramps, items at this dump include vehicle parts such as shock-absorbers and oil filters.[41] Former mill hand Vic Wilson, who worked at the mill during

the 1930s and 1940s remembers that the mechanic's name was Charlie and that he was a French national. This mechanic lived in a house close to the workshop behind the office, after leaving Spencer's employ he is reported to have moved to Kingaroy.[42]

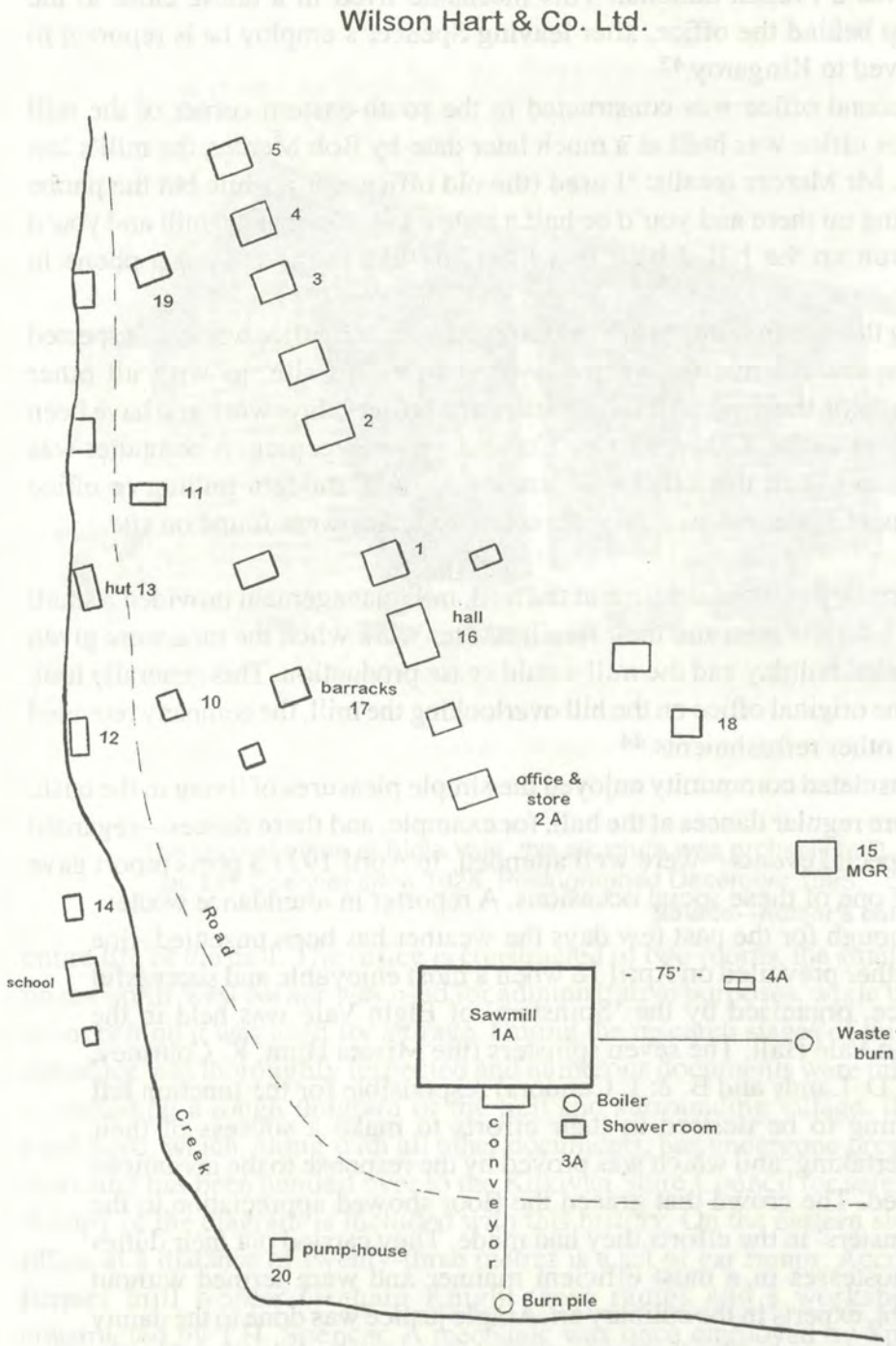
The second office was constructed in the south-eastern corner of the mill floor. This office was built at a much later date by Bob Mercer, the mill's last manager. Mr Mercer recalls: 'I used (the old office) for a while but the phone used to ring up there and you'd be half a mile away down at the mill and you'd have to run up the hill. I built that little box-like thing and put a phone in there.'[43]

During the research stages of this history this second office was also inspected and some documentation was recovered from the site, as with all other documentation these records have undergone preservation work and have been handed over to the Kilkivan Shire Council for safekeeping. A computer was evidently in use in this office—testimony to more modern milling or office management systems—as computer software boxes were found on site.

Christmas was a special time at the mill, mill management provided a small party for the men and their families after work when the men were given a few weeks' holiday and the mill would cease production. This generally took place at the original office on the hill overlooking the mill, the company provided beer and other refreshments.[44]

This insulated community enjoyed the simple pleasures of living in the bush. There were regular dances at the hall, for example, and these dances—regarded as very special events—were well attended. In April 1931 a press report gave details of one of these social occasions. A reporter in attendance wrote:

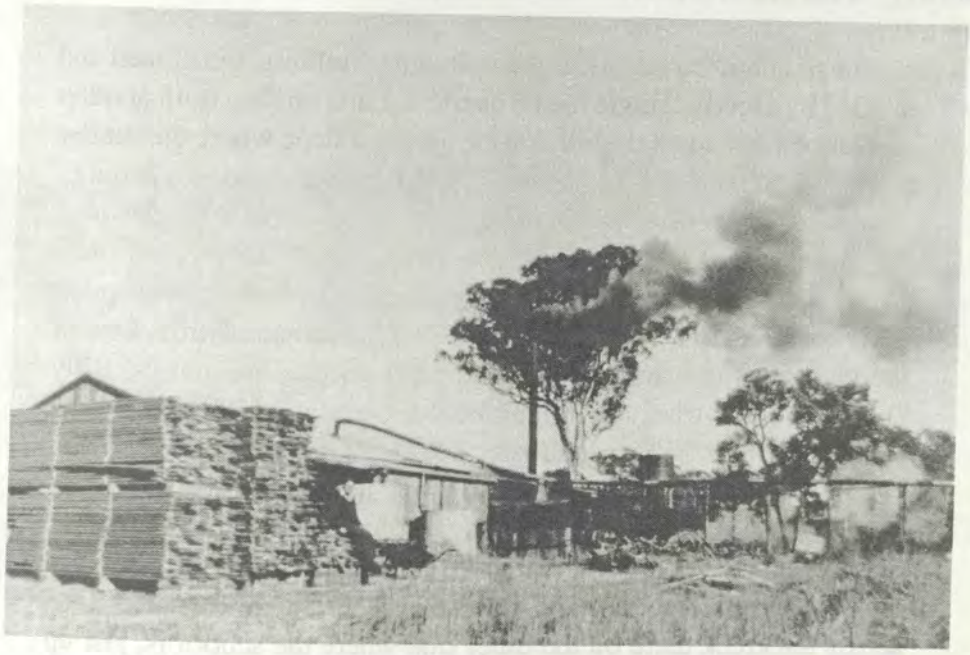
> Although for the past few days the weather has been unsettled, fine weather prevailed on April 18 when a most enjoyable and successful dance, organised by the 'Spinsters' of Elgin Vale was held in the Elgin Vale Hall. The seven spinsters (the Misses Hunt, K. Courtney, A.V.D. Lands and B. & I. Connors) responsible for the function left nothing to be desired in their efforts to make a success of their undertaking, and which was proved by the response to the invitations issued. The crowd that graced the floor showed appreciation to the 'spinsters' in the efforts they had made. They carried out their duties as hostesses in a most efficient manner and were termed without doubt, experts in the culinary art. Ample justice was done to the dainty supper provided by them, everyone being satisfied that good cooks are in evidence. Dance lovers tripped the light fantastic until the early hours of the morning under the conductor-ship of Mr D. Adams, a most efficient M.C. (Adams, as we have seen in previous chapters,



Layout of buildings - Elgin Vale

This plan has been drawn from a rough layout discovered at the original Elgin Vale sawmill office during field research, December, 1995. It is not to scale and the positioning of buildings is not entirely accurate.

Reduced



North-eastern corner of the mill showing one of the sawn timber piles and a fairly 'black stack'.
Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

was Elgin Vale's war hero, the winner of the D.C.M. in 1918). Mystery waltz, a married couples' waltz, and a single couples' waltz were held and won by Mr D. Adams and Mrs Webb, Mr and Mrs H. Barrett and Mr Ninnis and Miss Smith, respectively. The prizes for these three waltzes were generously donated by Miss P. Hohensee, Brisbane. The hall was most artistically decorated by Miss Courtney (Elgin Vale's teacher) and Mr S. Adams. Excellent music was provided by Miss D. Lands and Mrs Ted Hunt and others. Misses Courtney and B. Connors acted as joint secretaries. On behalf of the visitors Mr Ninnis thanked the spinsters for their untiring efforts in bringing about such a successful function. The singing 'They Are Jolly Good Fellows', followed by three hearty cheers for the 'Spinsters', drew to a conclusion one of the most enjoyable evenings ever held in the district.[45]

According to lifelong resident of Elgin Vale, Mr Douglas Porter, the hall at Elgin Vale was originally a barracks built by T.H. Spencer for the single men working at the mill. Mr Porter recalls the layout of the interior of the barracks, claiming:

> ... it had about ten rooms, it was a longish building, petitioned and divided into rooms, single men's quarters. Later on they built another barracks farther down the hill, (on the northern slope where the stumps and other remains can still be seen). They knocked the inside out of this (the first) barracks ... and put in a crow's ash floor for dancing, and that's where they held the dances ... They nearly always had crowds, people even came from Nanango and Goomeri and the other mills in the region. The music was mostly piano accordion. One of the mainstays (musicians) over the years was a chap named Billy Dale. He drove trucks there and he was very good. He played the piano accordion. Bill was killed by a log later on, a log rolled on him off the truck and squashed him. He was a wonderful player, he'd play all night if they wanted him to. The accident happened, I think, over at Gallangowan somewhere ... so that was the end of Bill, he would have been in his fifties somewhere, he had kids. He lived across the creek there on the other side where the school is, just up above the school, he had a house there. There were a few houses that side of the school, there was one just at the back of the school, there was one across the present road on that side and up the creek there were a couple more.[46]

Billy Dale was working for sub-contractor Jim Knipe at the time of his death. Jim Knipe recalls the tragic event: 'He was loading a truck-load of logs, and he rolled a log up onto the truck and he was walking back to start to roll up another one and this log rolled back down the skids and up the hill and ironed him out from feet to head, dropped him over and ran over him from his feet right up to his head, flattened him.'[47]

Dale's body was taken to Murgon for burial. Mrs Thelma Knipe claims that he was becoming deaf and was getting too old for the dangerous work. According to Mrs Knipe he was due to leave Jim Knipe's employment within a few weeks. The accident happened on the Manumbar reserve. Mr Dale's widow received a compensation payment following the death of her husband and later moved with her children to Maryborough.[48]

Dance nights at the hall were sometimes uproarious affairs. Alcohol was not allowed inside the hall, the mill owners, (who, of course also owned the hall) were unlicensed to sell alcohol, and, in any case, the evenings there were generally community affairs, organised by local committees or other groups.

The site of the Elgin Vale hall. Only the stumps now remain. Note the mill and mill office in the background.

Source—Author's collection

Catering was supplied by the people of the village, usually the women, sandwiches, tea and coffee being served during the evening, the musicians and dancers taking a break at around ten or ten thirty p.m. Graeme Ryan recalls: 'You'd all sit down right around the hall, and the first thing was, somebody would come out with a big carton of cups, each person would get a cup, and he'd be followed by a fellow carrying the tea and another bloke carrying the coffee, and they usually commandeered a couple of girls and they'd come along behind with the sandwiches, and that was tea-time at Elgin Vale. That was between ten and eleven, because it (the dance) would go on until two o'clock in the morning.'[49]

At the end of each dance many of the men present would go outside to smoke and to drink alcohol, and rubbish accumulated at a dump on the southern side of the remains of the hall is testimony to this. These small dumps contain bottles of various ages, some evidently quite old as they are well weathered and sun-bleached. There are port, wine, beer, rum and whiskey bottles in great number.

One of the men who frequented the hall at this time was benchman Vic Wilson, his wife recalls that Mr Wilson would bring a small bag, similar to a

doctor's bag, in which were several bottles of wine. Mrs Wilson claims: ' ... He'd go up and he'd have a doctor's bag, now I'm telling tales, and he'd sit in the hall with his little doctor's bag and when the dance was over he'd get up and walk out and all the fellows would follow and the women used to ... (complain) because they had no-one to dance with.' Her husband Vic Wilson adds: 'The beer would be too hot, you had to have wine. They were good nights; we used to have a lot of Red Cross dances there, in aid of the Red Cross.'[50]

According to various eyewitness accounts recorded for this history, fights between men were frequent occurrences during these nights, and were so common as to be almost *de rigueur.* These altercations were regularly caused due to excessive use of alcohol and the lack of female companions, a situation that often created some jealousies. According to Douglas Porter, T.H. Spencer once banned all alcohol from the dances because of the disturbances it was creating.[51] In fact Spencer, himself a teetotaller, appears to have been something of a stickler when it came to licensed halls and was always careful to ensure that such halls were properly run. For example, at the monthly meeting of the Kilkivan Shire Council held on Wednesday 6 November, 1929, Spencer moved that all licensed halls within the shire should be inspected by the works overseer.[52]

The hall at Elgin Vale was not, of course, licensed, but the problems of alcohol abuse there were perennial. Log contractor Jim Knipe recalls: ' ... Some bright spark would bring out a five gallon keg of beer and everybody would get drunk and finish up in fights, drunks fighting. They had no piano in the hall, it was only the accordion, a few of the old blokes could play good music too.'[53]

Former mill worker Graeme Ryan recalls: 'The music was the old piano accordion and drums as a rule, and at odd nights there we had fellows with a bit of ability come along and play the spoons or something like that, the Gaedtke family was one of the lots of musicians we had there. Old Billy Gaedtke he was cutting timber here at the head of the river at that time, he and his son used to play the drums and his daughter also—she was only big enough to (just) hold the accordion but she used to play the accordion. In later years Joan and Les Capper, they were the chief musicians there for a good number of years. Joan used to play the piano accordion and Les used to play the drums, and also keep time with the heel of the foot on the stage, terrific musicians, it's a pity to see the old hall go ... It was a little narrow hall, if you learned to dance there you learned to turn corners on a dance floor.'[54]

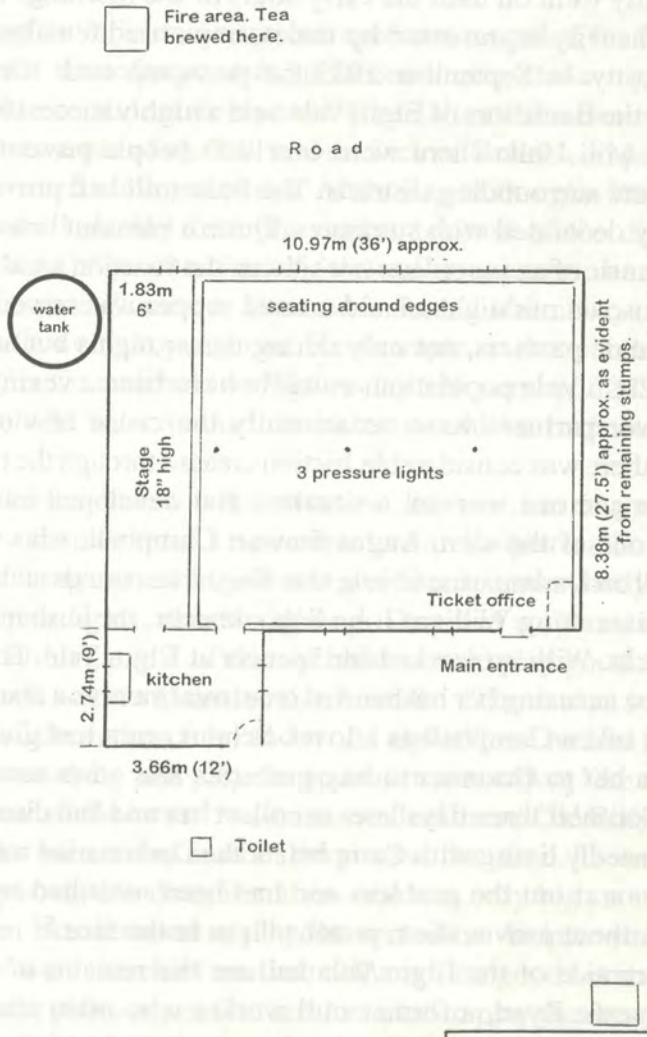
Former timber truck driver Jack Brown recalls: '(The dance nights) ... were terrific, the only thing the boys used to take the grog out and there would usually be a couple of fights every night, every time there was a dance on there would be a big fight. I remember Tom (T.H.) Spencer, he had two chaps who used to

drive his bulldozer ... Well, these two fellows used to camp in a big old van, it was an old Republic truck that had been ... (converted to) a house on wheels. I bought it afterwards from Spencer and we used it for our cutters, in fact one chap spent his honeymoon in it ... It was parked at the back of the hall. Well, one particular night this chap took a girl up there and her brothers came on the scene ... well that's when a big fight went on.'[55]

One of the most popular events at the hall was the legendary bachelors' ball, an event that usually went on until the early hours of the morning. There were many such balls, heavily represented by males, unmarried females definitely being in the minority. In September 1933 the press reported: 'On Saturday night August 26th the Bachelors of Elgin Vale held a highly successful function at the Elgin Vale Mill Hall. There were over 200 people present and were representative of the surrounding districts. The little mill hall proved a pretty scene being neatly decorated with streamers. Quite a pleasant time was spent in dancing to the music of an accordeon (sic) giving the function a real bachelor's atmosphere ... close on midnight a hand-around supper was served.'[56]

The lack of female partners, not only during dance nights but as a general condition of the Elgin Vale population, seems to have been a vexing problem, and jealousies over partners were occasionally the cause of violence. For example, in 1939 there was considerable friction created through the relationship between two men and one woman, a situation that developed into a serious court case when one of the men, Angus Stewart Campbell, who worked for Spencer at his mill on Dadamarine Creek, was fined five pounds at the Goomeri Police Court for assaulting William John Schonknecht, the husband of Melba Gloria Schonknecht. William worked for Spencer at Elgin Vale. The case was a tragic one, Melba accusing her husband of cruel treatment as a result of which she had allegedly taken Campbell as a lover. Schonknecht had given his wife £7/10/- and taken her to Goomeri to buy groceries and other necessities. He had returned to Goomeri three days later to collect her and had discovered that his wife was reportedly living with Campbell at the Dadamarine mill. He went to Dadamarine to sort out the problem and had been assaulted by Campbell who, evidently without provocation, punched him in the face.[57]

On the southern side of the Elgin Vale hall are the remains of a fireplace. According to Graeme Ryan, a former mill worker who often attended these dance nights, there were two such fireplaces, one on the southern side on the hill, and another on the northern side, down the slope between the hall and the barracks. This lower fireplace was next to an apple tree, the stump of which can still be seen today. These fireplaces were used to brew the tea and coffee served at the hall during dance evenings, the water being boiled in 20 gallon kerosene tins. Tea, coffee and sandwiches were served by the ladies to the



Community Hall, Elgin Vale.

This plan has been drawn from details supplied by Graeme Ryan. Distances are approximations only. Some stumps remain and measurements have been taken from these. The step to the stage extended across the hall and was used as seating during supper. Wooden windows hinged on the side, opened inwards (hall), while in the kitchen there were shutters hinged at the top which pushed out and were propped open with a piece of wood. The ticket office was a movable counter.

Scale 1:100

Reduced

dance patrons who would be seated on narrow benches that ran around the inside walls of the hall. (See diagram).[58]

Car parking was generally kept to the eastern side of the hall, and it was here the men would frequently gather during dances in order to drink alcohol that they kept in the boots of their cars.[59]

Mrs Irene Coleman recalls: 'We had marvellous dances there, there were fancy dress balls and when the mill was working twenty-four hour shifts we had a lot of the Maryborough people up and we had a wonderful time then when all those people came. They were from all walks of life, we had a crowd of surveyors who were surveying up in the scrub, and that was great, of course I was young then. Sometimes we had gramophone music and sometimes it would be the accordion, we had a couple of concerts there, we had a piano for that although I can't recall where the piano came from ... People would come from Brisbane, they'd be visiting, and they'd think it was wonderful.'[60]

During the war years the hall became inundated with soldiers on dance nights, the soldiers were on leave from their training camps in the scrub and their bases. Vic Wilson recalls: 'They'd be camped about eight or nine miles from Elgin Vale, they were mostly from the tank division. They brought their own piano and pinched all the girls. They'd give us tea, that was all rationed, butter, tea, sugar, they'd bring chocolates and stuff that we couldn't buy. We didn't get full or anything, but I did take the wine and that and give them all a drink. I used to get the wine from Nanango or Goomeri, they'd send it out on a cream truck. You could get wine a lot cheaper then, four bob for a Penfolds Reserve or McWilliams Reserve, four shillings. We weren't earning too much, I used to get £9/10/1d a fortnight.'[61]

Like all the other buildings at the village, the hall was constructed of untreated pine timber that seemed to weather well but was eventually badly damaged by white ants. It was rectangular in shape, running west to east, (see diagram). There were two entrances, both on the southern side closer to the hill. One entrance led directly into a kitchen area where sandwiches and other cold foods were prepared and the other stepped up from the south-east corner into the main hall. A small cubicle was situated to the right of the entrance and from here tickets to the dances were issued. Lighting was provided by three pressure lamps hanging from the rafters. At the western end of the hall there was a stage, this ran the whole width of the building and was approximately eighteen inches high. A step up to the stage was used for additional seating.[62]

Church services were sometimes held at the hall, and the event was generally something of a festive occasion. Ministers would travel from Nanango to deliver their sermons. Graham Knight recalls: 'It used to be quite a day out, everyone would bring their picnic lunch and they'd have a church service and have lunch afterwards.' People from all over the district, principally farmers and their

Graham Knight, former mill worker and councillor of the Kilkivan Shire Council. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

families, would come to Elgin Vale for these services, the village serving as the social and religious centre of the region.[63]

Many of the events held at the hall were designed to aid certain charities and other types of organisations, and significant amounts of money were often raised. For example a dance was held at the hall in July 1935, the press reporting: 'The most successful dance on record for this district was held in the Elgin Vale dining hall, kindly lent by Mr T.H. Spencer in aid of the Kingaroy Ambulance. The function was organised by Miss Hohensee and other ladies of the district. The music was supplied by Mr Dale assisted by Mr Davis and Mr Justo, Mr D.J. Adams carried out the duties of M.C. and the ambulance will benefit to the extent of twenty-seven pounds ten shillings by the takings for the night.'[64] This report is interesting for two of the musicians mentioned, Dale and Justo, were, as we have seen, later killed during separate logging accidents.

Another report of 1947 again demonstrates how the hall was used for charitable purposes, a fancy dress dance was held at the Elgin Vale hall in aid of school funds on Saturday 22 November, 1947, the press reporting: ' ... an enjoyable time was spent by all and Manumbar and surrounding districts were well represented.'[65] In 1951, the press again reported: 'The secretary of the Elgin Vale Benefit Committee, Mr S.G. Knight, reports that a profit of more than thirty pounds was the result of the dance held at the Elgin Vale hall on May 19th in aid of the Nanango Ambulance. There was a good crowd present in spite of the wet night and a happy time was spent by all. The box of groceries which the committee raffled was won by ... Mr A. Fleming of Barambah Road, Goomeri.'[66]

Additionally, the hall was the venue for the monthly meetings of the Q.C.W.A., and members of the Elgin Vale branch would frequently hold functions there, cookery contests and other fund-raising events.[67]

Chapter Six

Times of Struggle and Prosperity

When the mill was reopened following the end of the Great Depression, the milling industry in Queensland was still facing severe problems and operators of mills in the country areas, mills such as Elgin Vale, were informed that the supply of softwoods was rapidly diminishing and that the life of these mills could be measured in just a few years. It was, indeed, depressing news. In April 1940 the now defunct *Nanango News* published:

> It is many years since Queensland was warned that its hoop pine forests would not last forever; but the cry of 'wolf' has never been taken seriously. Even now, since ruination is facing many country sawmills, few of the general public are aware of the fact. True, the re-planting of our depleted forests has been on a fairly generous scale for a decade or two; but there is facing the pine saw-millers in many country districts a long period between the end of our hoop and bunya pine forests which were inherited, and those that have been planted, when softwoods will have to be imported from other countries. Incidentally, while this crisis is looming, a quantity of upwards of 20,000,000 superficial feet of Queensland pine has been shipped in one year to the Southern States, this is irrespective of the large production of plywood, 85 per cent of which is sent out of the State. That the demand for Queensland softwoods has increased in an astonishing degree, may be deduced from the following figures taken from the report of the Director of Forests for the year 1938-39. Hoop, bunya, kauri, and cypress pine during five years' period, 1929-30 to 1933-34, 286,201,000 super feet; during five years' period 1934-35 to 1938-39, 692,144,000 super feet. The proportion of hoop and bunya pine in the first of these five year periods, was 196,000,000 super feet, whereas the proportion has increased to 554,000,000 super feet in the second five-year period.
>
> In the year 1937, the Queensland Forest Service issued a statement of the effect, that there was at that time 720,000,000 of hoop and bunya pine remaining in the State Forests.
>
> Allowing for a probable miscalculation in no small degree, it will

be seen from the foregoing figures, that the time when the hoop and bunya forests of Queensland will be exhausted is near at hand.

Realising this inevitable crisis, a quota system of log sales was adopted by the Queensland Forest Service in 1938, in the terms of which saw-millers were given the right to purchase pine logs in relation to their respective purchases during the previous year. This does not imply that they could purchase the same quantity as they had bought in the previous year. (Subsequently, it was agreed by the Queensland Forest Service, that either of the years 1935, 1936 or 1937, could be taken as the basis on which the quota in relation to log purchases, could be calculated).

The effect of this policy has been to create the most serious position that has ever confronted pine saw-millers operating in country districts. If persisted in, it spells their ruination, the loss of their employment by some hundreds of sawmill employees, and serious effect upon businesses in country timber centres.

In regard to the export of pine from this State, it is now announced that the trade with the Southern States, is to be greater than that of last year, by a number of saw-millers who formed an Association in 1932 to deal with the export of pine.

It is not denied, that membership of this Export Association, is open to country saw-millers; but it is asserted that the large trade of which a comparative few took advantage, under the privileges granted by the Government, enormously enhanced their quotas of pine logs, based upon their purchases in either of the years 1935, 1936 or 1937.

Country saw-millers had no means of knowing that such a rationing of logs was contemplated nor that the basis would include the export trade expedient. On the contrary, it has been an acknowledged principle that sawmills established in country districts would be entitled to priority in the purchase of log timber in their vicinity. To rule otherwise, as the quota system has done, has been to strike at a vital principle.

In the investment of capital in machinery and plant, and in the provision of homes for their employees, consideration could necessarily be given to the amount of Crown timber in the vicinity, to warrant the expenditure. Advances from banks and lending institutions would be based upon the same law, if unwritten, at least understood.

The question to which it is hoped the government will have immediate attention is the provision of sufficient log pine to enable these sawmills to work to their full capacities, or at least to an

economic capacity, ensuring that the wages laid down in the awards governing sawmills shall be real wages and not intermittent ones.

In many cases, saw-millers realising that the supplies in their midst were limited to 10 to 15 years cutting, regulated their purchases accordingly. Some of them divided up their milling operations by sawing a proportion of timbers other than pine. Now they find that inroads have been made upon their forests to such an extent, that the lifetime to their mills has been reduced to a much shorter period, and with uneconomic supplies of logs meantime.

It is of much importance to the State, that sawmilling should continue to be a rural industry. Our Parliamentarians who represented country districts have always advocated the encouragement of industry in country centres, instead of centralising all of them in the cities. When in the course of a few years, it becomes necessary for this once favoured State to import softwoods, the mills in the country will suffer relatively to the gain of the mills in Brisbane with their facilities for importing timber from other countries ... Complaints can be heard on all sides of trainloads of logs passing by idle sawmills, while on their journey to Brisbane. Saw-millers as far north as Bundaberg complain of the lack of sufficient pine logs, while trainloads pass by on their way from the Gladstone district to Brisbane, a distance of nearly 300 miles. Unless this violation of the rights of country saw-millers is revoked, there is stark ruination facing many of them.

When the time comes to harvest the product of Queensland's pine plantations, upon which large sums of money have been expended, the country mills will have passed out of existence. The extent of such a calamity can only be adequately judged when attention is paid to a number of flourishing townships which grew out of their timber resources. Many a Queensland country district would not have been opened up but for the marketable timber they contained.

Sons of many sturdy pioneers who blazed the trail, are now finding their training and their mechanical inheritances of but little use, since they are denied adequate supplies of log timber to keep the wheels running.

The facts given seem to be sufficient justification for this statement of the position for the information of those who hate injustice.[1]

Despite this gloom, the mill at Elgin Vale continued to work on a steady basis until it was finally burnt down, four years later, in 1944.[2]

What actually caused the mill to burn is not known but at that time the region was suffering a particularly difficult time with bush fires. On 8 May, 1944, just three days before the mill at Elgin Vale was burned to the ground, the *Maryborough Chronicle* reported:

> Dangerous fires racing through tinder-dry country in the South Burnett district yesterday were fought and beaten by V.D.C. men and sawmill workers. Strenuous efforts by the fire-fighters saved stock and property. Fanned by a strong westerly, the fires ruined many grazing holdings and dairy farm lands near Wondai before being smothered. 'There is a grave danger of more disastrous fires than Queensland has yet known,' said a North Coast grazier last night. Most serious fire hazard was the dry waist-high grass in most districts.
>
> 'The fire hazard is more serious in Queensland now than for many years,' said a forestry authority last night. 'There is a vast area of Queensland at present in which a few sparks could do incalculable damage.'
>
> 'Grass fires which destroyed essential food for stock were the greatest menace, the record of damaging fires in Queensland was sufficient to show the need for legislative action on the question of control,' he said.
>
> Bush fire brigades, on the Victorian lines, should be established.[3]

The *Gympie Times* was equally as alarmed and gave graphic descriptions of fires that were raging in the South Burnett at that time, strong winds were making it difficult for fire-fighters to overcome the outbreak.[4]

Early in the morning of 11 May, 1944, the residents of Elgin Vale awoke to a frightening crackle and crash as the mill was destroyed before their eyes—even people on distant farms could see the lurid glow in the night sky. The following day the press reported:

> Wilson, Hart and Company's Elgin Vale sawmill, 25 miles from Goomeri, was burned to the ground in a disastrous fire early yesterday morning. Damage caused by the blaze is estimated at £10,000. Inquiries last night reveal that, although the mill itself is a total loss, the timber stack some distance away from the mill was not destroyed.
>
> The cause of the fire is a mystery. There were no bush fires in the vicinity. An inspection yesterday did not reveal any clue as to the cause.
>
> The fire was first noticed about 12.40 o'clock yesterday morning when it was well under way. The heat was so intense that nobody

> could approach within chains of the mill. There was no water available to fight the flames.
>
> The mill employed 24 hands. An insurance assessor is expected to arrive at Goomeri today. The mill was insured but the amount was not disclosed.[5]

The *Gympie Times* report of the event gives a slightly different time, claiming: 'The sawmill owned by Wilson Hart and Co. of Maryborough and situated at Elginvale, about 24 miles from Goomeri, was completely destroyed by fire at 1.20 am on Thursday. The sawn timber in the yards was saved from damage by the good work of volunteer fire-fighters. The origin of the fire is unknown, but the damage, which it is understood, is covered by insurance, will be considerable.'[6]

Whether the earlier press warnings of bush fires were prophetic or not is a moot point and we shall now never know why the mill at Elgin Vale went up in flames. Clearly the mill was not in a perilous situation, the news reports, if they can be believed, indicate that no bush fires were burning in the vicinity of the mill, although the region *was* tinder dry. Additionally, mill management at that time may have been keeping a fire break around the mill, such a break was certainly a feature of the mill in later years and fire permits were regularly issued to the mill's manager in order to keep the ground around the mill clear of grass and rubbish.[7] However, there were added risks—the mill was powered by steam provided by a boiler—itself a hazard, winter was close at hand and in the notoriously cold winter climate of the Elgin Vale region many of the houses in the village would have been heated by wood-fire, stoves and chip-heaters, and these would have added to the danger of sparks flying into the mill. Former mill worker Vic Wilson of Toowoomba was living at Elgin Vale at the time of the fire and he recalls that fateful night:

> The fire started in the middle of the mill because one of the fellows that worked there came down (the hill) in his utility and he saw the little blaze (in the centre of the mill). There was a lot of stuff we could have saved, but Sid Laxton, he went away on holidays that day and then the mill got burned down that night. (Sid) was on his way to Maryborough and then the (Wilson Hart management) got him out of the train and fetched him (back to the mill). They (the other workers) yelled out and so I went down, we all went down there, we could have saved some big saws, but one fellow came along and said, 'Oh well, don't save anything, it's all insured,' so we never bothered. They were all yelling out, but we couldn't do anything, we

The southern side of the mill at Elgin Vale showing the log ramps leading to the breaking down bench. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

had no water, the creek was there but we had nothing to pump it with. But after they built the new mill they put a big pump on down there and it had a hang of a force on it and it would put out any fire. But the mill itself, I remember myself in the summer time it was very dry, and the sparks used to come out (of the boiler) and set some of those old boards alight, the floorboards; you see the mill was up high and the floorboards were a bit old and rotten, and some of those sparks used to catch the boards on fire and they used to have to get down and put them out. There was a lot of pine in the mill (at the time of the fire), I don't know, someone could have lit it. They had a few rumours at the time. (After the fire) they kept us all on and we had to pull all the parts (machinery) out of the thing and we started building the other one then. I shifted from there then, I got a job in Nanango with Hancock and Gore, another mill there until this one was built and then I went back there (to Elgin Vale) again.[8]

The breaking down bench with the frame saw beside it. Photographed December 1995.

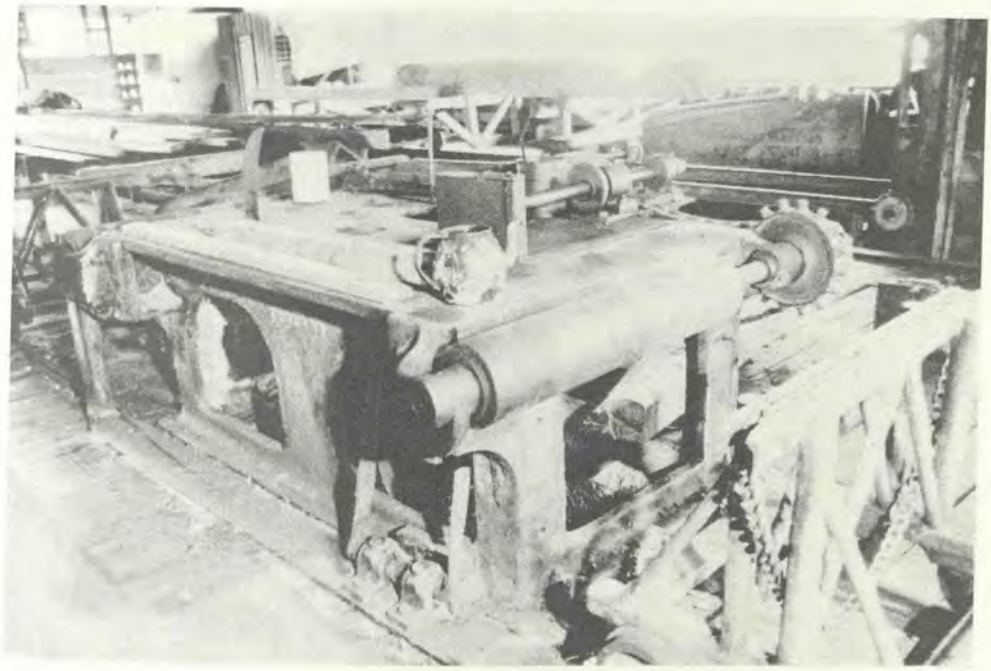
Source—Author's collection

Using the insurance money Wilson Hart rebuilt the mill, although, rather than two boilers, thereafter the machinery functioned with just one.

1944 was indeed a bad year for sawmills generally and several Queensland mills were destroyed by fire, including those at Lowood, Elgin Vale, Yeerongpilly and Cairns. These fires caused something of a shortage in timber and an estimated fifteen per cent of the state's plywood production was lost.[9]

It was reported in the *Maryborough Chronicle* of October 1965 that at one time the Wilson Hart operation was employing seventy-five bullock teams and several hundred men from many regions including those working for the Elgin Vale mill.

The operations of the mill appeared to have little to do with the local council, and there are only scant references in council minutes to the mill after it had been purchased by Wilson Hart. These references give us little, if any real history of the mill, and are mainly of academic value. For example, in June



The number one saw, this was the heart of the entire mill's operations. The saw-bench was manufactured by T. Robinson and Son Ltd, Rochdale, England. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

1940 the minutes reveal that a letter had been received ' ... From Messrs Wilson Hart & Co requesting permission to erect a telephone line across roads from Manumbar to their Elgin Vale mill. Moved by Cr P.M. Perrett, Seconded by Cr Davies that permission be granted provided that the work is carried out in accordance with the regulations.'[10]

Up until 1946 the men at Elgin Vale worked a forty-eight hour week, Monday to Saturday. After that date the hours changed to forty hours per week, although according to mill documents the working hours were not always defined in this way and the mill hands sometimes worked for eight and a half hours each day with pay-day every second week being a half-day holiday. A break for ten minutes was taken at 9 a.m., those men working on the saw-benches generally took their tea seated in one corner of the mill, while those working below at the machinery or on the manufacture of butter and fruit boxes took their break below the mill. Tea was brewed using a steam valve and coil from the main boiler. The men brought their own sandwiches for morning breaks.[11]

Number two bench, this was manufactured by Marshall Son and Co., of Gainsborough. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

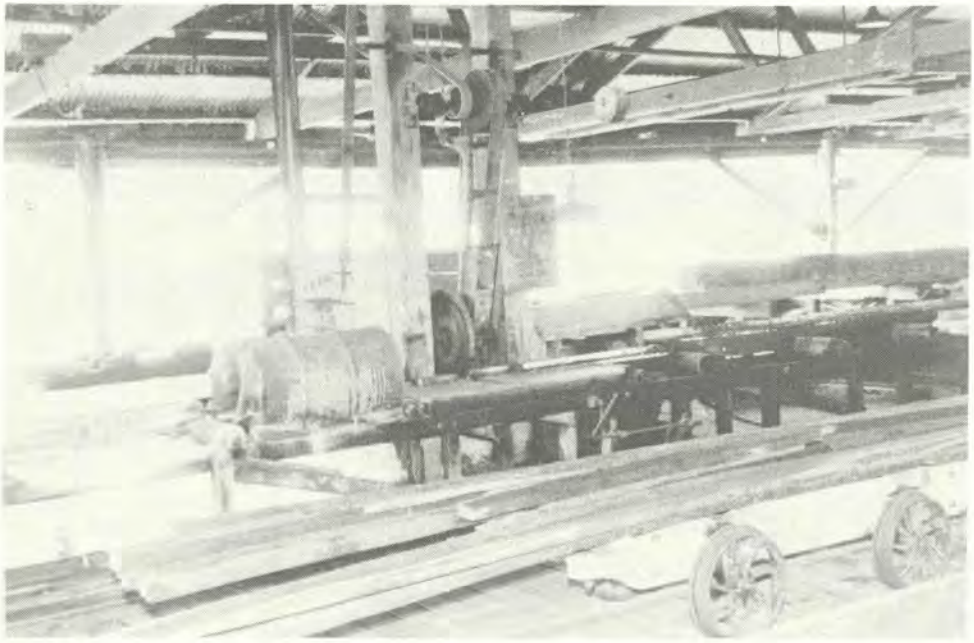
The change from a forty-eight hour week to forty hours a week created some speculation in Nanango, retailers believing that with Saturdays free, the people of Elgin Vale would be more willing to travel into the nearby township to purchase their requirements. A press report detailing the comments of a member of the Nanango Chamber of Commerce, published in the now defunct *Nanango Advocate* in November that year claimed: ' ... The Elgin Vale sawmill has just been granted a 40 hour week ... do the Chamber of Commerce realise that this is their business? Upwards to 25 or 30 families live at Elgin Vale and 95 per cent of the shopping is done in another town ... (Goomeri), would it be an idea to concentrate on this business? Consider the extra business that would be done in Nanango. At first sight it does not look very much but over a period business would be tremendous ... I suggest the Chamber formulate a policy to bring these residents to Nanango to shop ... '[12]

Benefits generally were slow in coming to the men and women of Elgin Vale. At that time there were still no modern facilities, no electricity, sewerage

Working area of the mill looking towards the breaking-down saw.
Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

systems or town water, although a superannuation scheme was introduced by Wilson Hart in 1955.[13]

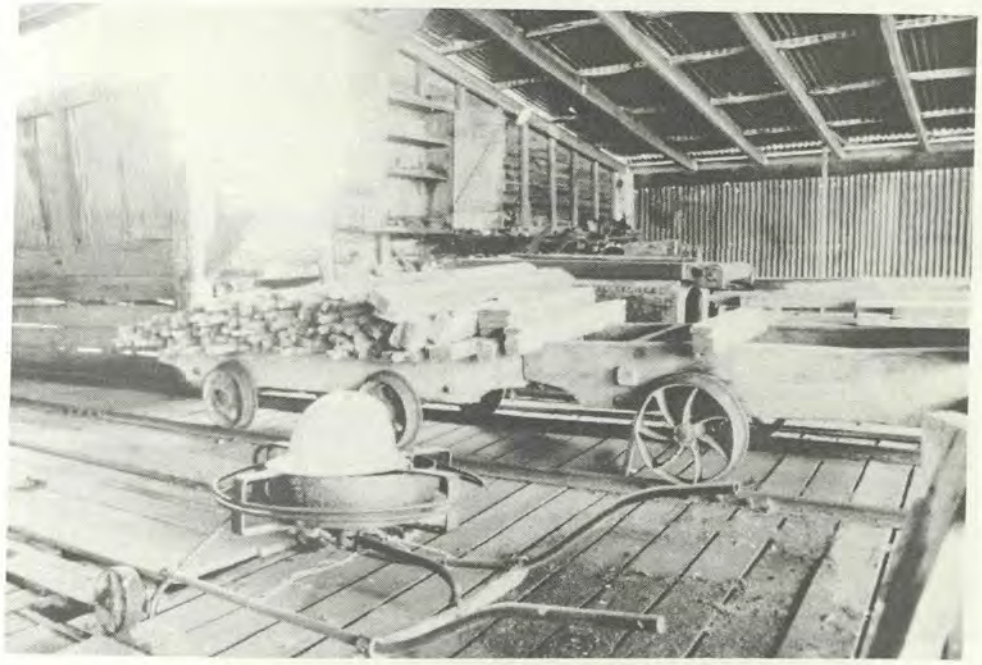
The operations of the mill were carefully designed to provide maximum output, the logs being rolled down the natural incline on the southern side (the front) of the mill, over a steel rack to the large breaking-down saws, there were two of these saws, one above and one below which were kept perfectly aligned. Flitches from these saws were then passed along to a set of wooden skids and from there were pulled across to the number one bench where they were broken down into board sizes. The heaviest work took place on the number one bench, although this bench was later aided with the use of a steam feed system that ran the logs through the saw. Graham Knight recalls: 'The number one bench was the key to the whole operation, everything else depended upon how fast that bench could work. The benchman fed the timber into the saw and one or two men worked on the other end, known as the tailer-out position, taking the planks out from the bench. The planks were then placed onto timber skids and from there moved to the number two bench to be broken down into smaller planks.



Docking saw. Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

Waste timber was placed down a chute close by, which went straight to the boiler or was carted outside for the fruit cases.'[14]

Timber went variously to the other saws as was required, some to the docking benches (one for each of the number one and number two benches) where it was cut to the required length, some went for dressing to the planing machine, situated in the north-east corner of the mill (but no longer in place), pine of excellent quality and required thickness was sometimes put through the frame saw, and it all went out on iron-wheeled trolleys at the eastern side of the mill where a special trolley system was designed to move to the various rail lines leading from each saw-bench. This trolley system, once loaded with sawn timber, would then be aligned with the railway that ran from the eastern side of the mill, travelling east for several hundred metres through piles of stacked sawn timber. The rail system was elevated for a distance of approximately forty metres when it came down to ground level. (Remnants of the line, especially the sleepers, can still be seen on site, stacked in a heap some forty metres from the eastern side of the mill). The system was all operated by hand, the wagons were pushed into alignment at the end of the mill to take the trolleys from the



Timber trolleys such as this ran from each of the benches to another larger trolley running along the eastern side of the mill. This larger trolley could be aligned with all the tracks running from the saw benches and then aligned with the rail line running through the timber stacking yard. In the background of this photograph is the area that once accommodated the planing machine. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

rail lines leading from the saw benches. The trolleys were then pushed by hand out into the holding yards.[15] Timber in this holding yard was originally covered with corrugated iron or canvas to protect it from the weather. Thousands of super feet of timber were stacked in this holding area where it was allowed to dry. Spacers, or 'strips' approximately an inch thick were placed between the timbers to allow ventilation. The timber was then known to have been 'stripped' and the men who carried out this work were 'strippers'. A shed was subsequently constructed on this site. Some believed that it was a maturing or drying shed, but according to Bob Mercer, mill manager at the time of the shed's construction, the shed was for storage purposes only.

Bob Mercer recalls: 'I put a shed up there, a big shed up there, it was only to stack dry timber in, it was just a long line of posts with a roof over it ... I think we had a bit of downtime, whether it was wet weather or not, we just got the

View of the timber yard on the eastern side of the mill, taken in 1982, showing the tram tracks. The trolley that can be seen on the right at the end of the mill was moveable, left or right to be aligned with the rails, each of which came from one of the saws. The trolley could then be pushed into alignment with the tracks that can be seen running into the timber yard.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

crew out and built it with a chain saw, a fork lift to stand the posts up.'[16] Apart from the timber used in the construction of this shed, materials were brought from Brisbane by semi-trailer. One or two loads of timber were, at that time, being sent to Brisbane and the truck was then back-loaded with anything that may have been required at the mill.[17]

Jim Knipe recalls that the sawn timber was stacked for more than six weeks and that it was machine tested for moisture prior to being sent to Goomeri.[18]

One of the men to work at the mill, now a councillor on the Kilkivan Shire Council, was Graham Knight. During an interview recorded with Mr Knight at the Elgin Vale mill on the morning of 9 December, 1995, Mr Knight stated:

> I was only here for about six months really, I was tailing-out on the case bench downstairs, and then I was on the docking saw upstairs. That was in 1960, I think. It was a busy mill at that time, there were

Eastern side of the mill showing where the timber was once stacked and where the rail line once ran. The pile of rubbish and timber in the foreground of the mill is the remains of the rail sleepers. Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

a lot of people in the mill and out in the yards. I worked under the mill where they used to cut timber for fruit cases out of waste timber, this was wood that wasn't put through into the boiler, it was cut on a small bench and parcelled up and sent away for fruit cases.[19]

Load of sawn pine leaving mill for Goomeri for rail to Maryborough, sawmill in background.

Source—Irene Coleman

The fruit cases were not manufactured at the mill, only the timber was cut there and the cases were put together elsewhere. Two men generally worked at this job of cutting timber for the cases. From cutting fruit case timber Mr Knight later went up onto the docking saw. Some of the men working in the mill at that time (the early 1960s) included George Barrett, Emil Gustav (Gus) Kerle, Ellis Hockey worked the number one bench and Roy Locke was also on number one bench. The manager was Dick Collard. Wages were basic, similar to those of a labourer.[20]

The timber sawn by the Elgin Vale mill was trucked to the railway station at Goomeri by Frank Coleman. According to a 1987 report in the *South Burnett Times* most of the timber cut at the mill was used in the building industry, although the mill also made butter boxes for the dairy industry.[21]

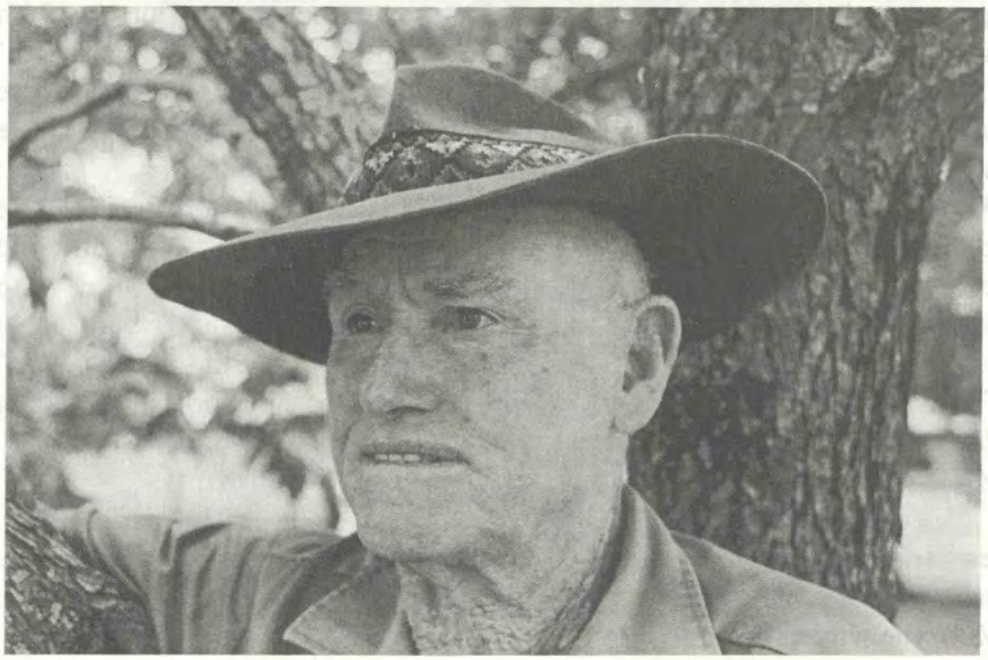
There have been numerous managers of the mill including Gus Reick, Ron Davies, Dick Collard and his son Ivan Collard. Dick Collard had reportedly previously served ten years at the mill in the capacity of bench-man on the number one bench.[22]

The men were sometimes subjected to agreements concerning their working hours and conditions. For example in March 1975 employees signed an agreement that stipulated that they would: ' ... agree to having Thursday 24th April, 1975 as our show day holiday instead of the Goomeri show as gazetted.' This agreement was signed by eleven of the employees—presumably all those who were working at the mill at that time. By August the same year there were twelve people employed at the mill when they signed the following agreement: 'We, the undersigned, employees of Wilson Hart and Co. Ltd., do hereby agree to work eight and a half hours for eight days per fortnight at ordinary time and to have four hours off each pay day (i.e. once per fortnight). We also agree to have one week of the annual holiday during the month of August (commencing 11th August, 1975 and re-commencing work on Monday 18th August, 1975).' This document was signed by the mill manager and his workers, including F.R. Dow, R.D. Kachel, W.K. Hockey, R.C. Hockey, E.N. Smith, A.R. Kachel, M. Smith, B. Talmon, K.J. Kachel, C. Finney and A.G. Richards.[23]

The general manager of Wilson Hart, J. McBryde, based at Maryborough, resigned his position in June 1975 and was replaced by Harold Marshall. In a memorandum to manager Ivan Collard at Elgin Vale, dated 27 June, 1975, McBryde wrote:

> At a meeting of the Board of Directors on Tuesday last, it was arranged that my retirement from the Company's employment should take place as soon as could be conveniently arranged.
>
> Harold Marshall was appointed General Manager, and Gordon Ponting was appointed to the position of Assistant General Manager, both appointments to take effect on my retirement date.
>
> I would like to express my gratitude for the loyalty of employees during my term as general manager, and for the happy associations I have enjoyed over the period of my employment with the Company.[24]

The last manager of the mill was Bob Mercer, who took over the position from Ivan Collard. During an interview with Mr Mercer, conducted at his home in Nanango on Tuesday 12 December, 1995, Mr Mercer stated that he started working in the timber industry at the age of fourteen with Hancock and Gore in Brisbane and has spent his entire working life in the milling industry, managing an assortment of mills including one in Papua New Guinea, another in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales and the Timber Corporation's mill at Nanango. When that mill closed in 1979 Mr Mercer started work at Elgin Vale, travelling each day from Nanango to Elgin Vale. As workers for the mill were difficult to obtain, Mr Mercer sometimes recruited men from Nanango and took them in his station wagon to the mill each day.[25] Wages at that time



Bob Mercer, last manager of the Elgin Vale mill.
Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

were approximately $300 to $400 a week for the men, depending upon their duties, Mr Mercer states: 'There were a lot better (wages) around, but the sawmilling game has always been like that, even today it's still poorly paid, they were, more or less, glorified labourers, even though it's heavy work.'[26]

Chapter Seven

Education at Elgin Vale

The first provisional school at Elgin Vale was opened in 1899 and was under the charge of a teacher named Elizabeth Sheridan. In the Goomeri State School Diamond Jubilee publication, published in 1987, Elizabeth Sheridan is described as a girl of eighteen years who had come from 'the city'. Upon her arrival at the tiny community of Elgin Vale she was reportedly given a tremendous welcome. Elizabeth Sheridan later married James Conners, an Irish immigrant who had taken up another resumption from Manumbar named Glen Erin in 1890. Miss Sheridan was said to have ridden two and a half miles to the school every day, except during times of drought when she walked that distance. Elizabeth Sheridan's daughter, Irene Coleman, was, as we have seen earlier in this history, married to Frank Coleman, one of the truck drivers who hauled timber for T.H. Spencer from the mill to the rail yards at Goomeri. Mrs Coleman recalls: 'My mother was the first teacher of an Elgin Vale school, she came from Brisbane to teach at Elgin Vale, she opened the school, but that was not where the mill is. She was eighteen when she came from Brisbane and she stayed with some lovely people but the eldest child was fourteen and she hadn't seen a school before, she turned out to be a marvellous scholar. She was there for six and a half years. I was taught privately by my mother and she was a marvellous teacher, I couldn't get away with a thing, she was a perfectionist. When she left, the Elgin Vale school closed down, there was a problem with the lack of children, they didn't have the numbers. The original school was situated several miles from Elgin Vale along the Goomeri road.'[1]

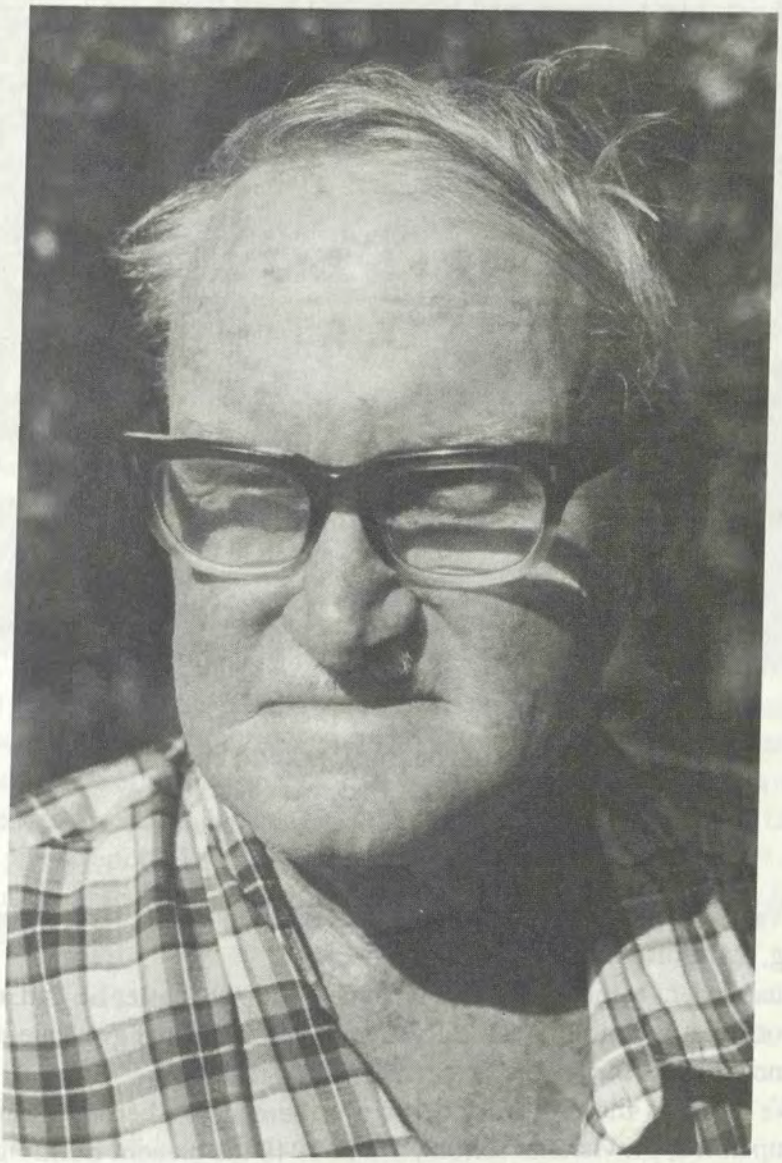
The provisional school was closed in 1905 owing to poor attendance, the buildings were sold to Mary Barnes, the committee secretary, for £20 and from that time until the mid 1920s there was no school operating at Elgin Vale until T.H. Spencer became involved in the region. The second school was constructed in 1927, its teacher, Miss Kathleen Courtney, and the school number, (1555) being transferred from Sefton. The initial enrolment was twenty-three students. Elgin Vale resident Douglas Porter, was one of the first-day pupils of the school opened by Spencer. He recalls that first day:

> There were about twelve or thirteen pupils, some came from the mill, others from round about the district, my sister and I were pupils there, we started that day, and the teacher, Kathleen Courtney, she was at

> Sefton when the mill was there and when they moved the mill down they moved her down too. She boarded with us, first of all at Elgin Vale (homestead), and when we moved here (to Mr Porter's present home, 'Telopea'), she moved at the same time. That was in February 1927. She was a strict teacher, and I've appreciated that ever since because I was a little bit cheeky and she got stuck into me. She was Australian, she came from Brisbane, and in those days there weren't many vehicles around, and when she was going to Brisbane we had to take her to the train at Theebine so that she could get home, and when she came back we had to go and pick her up. She was here for five years, I think, altogether. We always called her Miss Courtney, and so did my parents, they said if we started calling her Kathleen the kids will start calling her Kathleen and that wasn't respectful. She was fairly short, of Irish parentage, a nuggety girl, fair hair with blue/grey eyes. She had a horse, a quiet horse, she used to ride to school from here, she would wear riding britches and leggings, someone would catch the horse and away she went to school, and when she got to school she had to change into her dress, and after school she'd change again for the ride home. Her hat came around her head like a helmet.
>
> One of us kids caught the horse. We didn't get any special concessions for living with the teacher or catching her horse, that was out, in fact she may have treated us a little more harshly. She taught us the times-tables, basic reading and arithmetic. The next teacher was Irene Hicks. She was a bit the other way, she was a bit too soft, she was kinder to us. She was a nuggety girl too, she was a bit of a sport, in everything. She stayed with us for a while too. She was about nineteen, something like that, I think it might have been her first teaching post.[2]

The school closed from 1933 to 1935—probably due to the depressed state of the timber industry that similarly affected the mill. It was reopened in January 1935 with A.M. Bernier as its teacher, it closed again from August 1936 to October 1936, in 1948 a new school building was opened and the school was officially named the Elgin Vale State School (other than a provisional school).

Sitting in their classroom at the schoolhouse, the children could clearly hear the mill operations but Douglas Porter recalls that the noise of the industry did not affect the children's schooling. There were also other considerable disturbances, particularly from the trucks bringing logs to the mill down the road close to the school, but this too was considered a normal part of life at



Douglas Porter,
descendant of James Porter, one of the original pioneers of Elgin Vale.
Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

The Elgin Vale School, now Q.C.W.A. rest rooms.
Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

Elgin Vale and the children at the school seemed unaffected. 'Noise meant nothing,' Mr Porter said.[3]

A later student at the school was Graeme Ryan, who, after he had left school, also worked at the mill. Graeme Ryan started school at Elgin Vale in 1947, at that time P.K. Smith was the teacher. Mr Ryan recalls:

> We were in the old school, it's not there now, there was an old unpainted, provisional school, and in 1948 the present building was shifted out there from near Murgon, and when school started up in that (building) our teacher was Thomas Graham Brown. He was a married man, his wife used to teach the girls dressmaking and sewing, he also had two children of his own. He used to live in a mill house across the creek, most days he went home for lunch and on this particular day some of the boys killed a black snake in the school-ground and some fellow's bright idea was to put it under the steps at the front of the building, and when Graham Brown came back we were all standing around watching and Graham had one foot on the

> bottom step when he saw the tail end of the snake under the step and bounded back about three feet, and the way everyone was standing around looking I think he dropped to the fact that there was something wrong, and within no time there was five or six of us upstairs looking at getting the cane. But these things happened at one teacher schools ... It was a good school, the teacher didn't teach all classes, he had Grade Three, Grade Five, Grade Seven, and if somebody came there who had been Grade Four at Proston or somewhere like that, well he had to drop back into Grade Three at Elgin Vale or go up to Grade Five, depending whether he was bright or a bit behind ... Some of the fellows that came there had their education a bit mixed up. There were plenty of fights there at the old school, there were always two or three big fellows and a few middling fellows and a lot of little blokes and the bigger fellows used to rule the roost and it was nothing to have two or three fights through the dinner hour if the teacher went home for dinner. But it wasn't such a bad place.[4]

In 1965 the school was extended to accommodate up to fifty children, however, within twelve years the mill quota was cut, men were laid off work and, with their families, moved away. This deprived the school of many of its pupils and it was finally closed in 1977 when its remaining students were compelled to travel to Nanango for their education. The building was later taken over by the Elgin Vale Q.C.W.A. and used as rest rooms. In October 1979 the press reported: 'Elgin Vale C.W.A. Branch held their 1979 annual meeting in the branch's new rest rooms. This important function was held on September 20 ... '[5]

Chapter Eight

An Outline of Machinery Operations

The machinery at the Elgin Vale mill is all steam driven. According to various reports and personal reminiscences already cited in this history, there were originally two boilers but after the destructive fire of 1944 only one boiler was used to power the saw-benches. The engine had been manufactured by T. Robinson and Son Ltd of England, and this firm's name is inscribed on a plate attached to the machinery. According to a report published in the *South Burnett Times* in May 1980, the engine was originally used in a sawmill at Drayton in 1901. It remained in operation on the Downs until 1938 and was moved to Elgin Vale the following year.[1] As we have seen, according to a subsequent press report, a smaller engine was used for the planing machinery.[2] The concrete mounting for this engine can still be seen behind the main engine. The machinery is all in good working order and appears to be well maintained. One of the advantages of a steam mill over the far simpler electric mills is the strength, or torque, of the steam system which is reported to be able to cut logs far larger than mills powered by electricity.

Steam from the boiler provides the energy for the engine. The engine is used to turn the large flywheel which in turn revolves the main shaft through the medium of a drive belt. There are numerous pulleys attached to the drive shaft which in turn drive belts manufactured of canvas/rubber. These drive the various saws on the main floor of the mill.

The boiler is known as a double drum boiler, water, originally drawn from the nearby creek, was pumped up to the boiler and settled between the drums. Fire is economically provided in the furnace by burning wood chips, off-cuts and sawdust. Sawdust is carried away from the saw-benches on a conveyor belt that deposits it in a bin near the furnace. Excess sawdust was taken along the conveyor belt to a site beyond a corrugated iron wall where it was burnt. The wall was constructed to prevent sparks from the fire drifting across to the mill where, among the swirling sawdust and the oil-soaked planking of the engine area, they could have created a fire hazard. The conveyor belt to this site is no longer in place, but the belt still extends to the boiler. A lever on the belt was opened or closed to either drop sawdust into a pit near the boiler

furnace or to take it to the waste region for burning. Shavings from the planing machine were similarly treated, being blown through a galvanised pipe to the burning site close to the creek where they were incinerated. Power for the planing machine was provided by a smaller secondary boiler that was originally situated where the new boiler is currently placed. This boiler, purchased from the Kingaroy hospital, is not sufficiently powerful to provide steam to power the entire plant working at maximum production, but carries out the function of providing sufficient power to operate the plant during demonstration displays. The boiler was transported to Elgin Vale by truck and lifted into place by crane.[3]

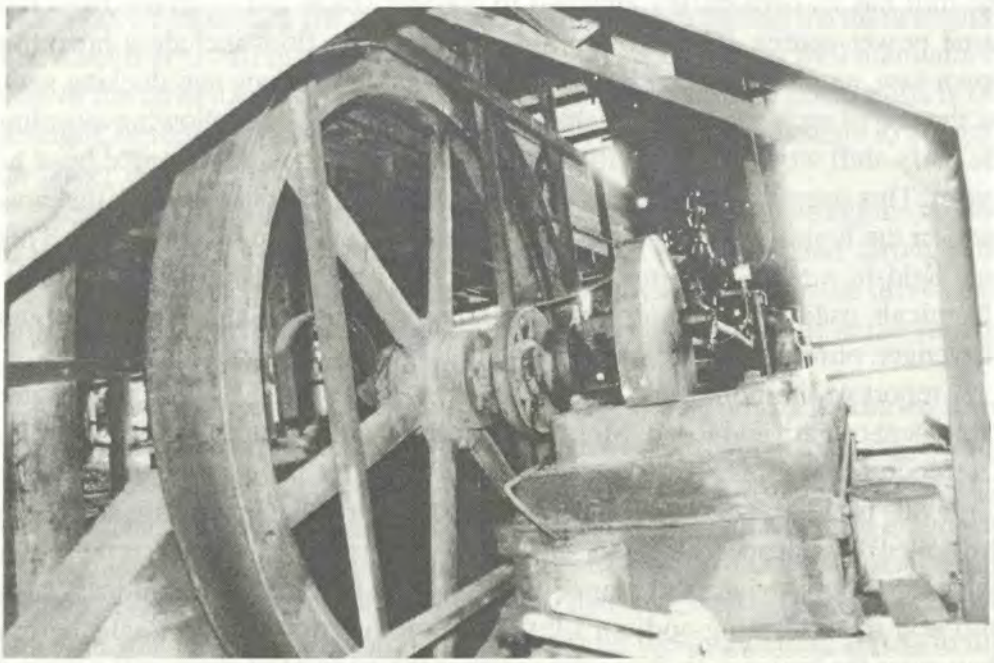
The original boiler is still on site but is no longer in use, rust is evident on this boiler and it is unlikely that it would be granted a safety certificate without extensive maintenance and repair.

Boiler maintenance and operations are specific crafts and there have been many fatal accidents in this country due to poor maintenance, especially at sawmills. The boiler requires regular cleaning and the water level has to be maintained and carefully watched in the water level gauge. Steam is regulated to the main steam cylinder thus driving the piston. The piston in turn drives the shaft that revolves the flywheel. A drive belt is set over the flywheel, and this is attached to the main drive shaft. Each of the saw-benches on the main floor of the mill has its own pulley attached to counter-shafts but is driven from the same power source. The saws on the main cutting floor include a breaking down saw, number one and number two saws, a frame saw and docking saw. At the end of each working day the fire was shut back. The following morning the early shift would flash up the boiler, bringing it up to the required head of steam. This operation could take several hours. Water from the creek that was used in the boiler was very hard and so had to be treated by chemicals. This was held in a tank, still in existence, on the western side of the building. Chemicals used in the treatment of the boiler included a catalysed oxygen scavenger, phosblend, and alkblend.[4]

A report of the boiler and its operations was prepared by Maxwell Water Treatment of Fairfield Road, Moorooka during the time the mill was operating. The document emphasises the fact that: 'The water taken from the creek at Elginvale is of very high hardness and will rapidly form dangerous scale within the boiler if not properly treated. The water softener installed softens the water by exchanging calcium and magnesium ions for sodium ions, ie hardness salts into non scale forming sodium salts. By removing the hardness salts before they enter the boiler with the water softener the amount of chemicals required is drastically reduced and the amount of sludge formed within the water is also drastically reduced. Careful control on water treatment is essential.'[5]

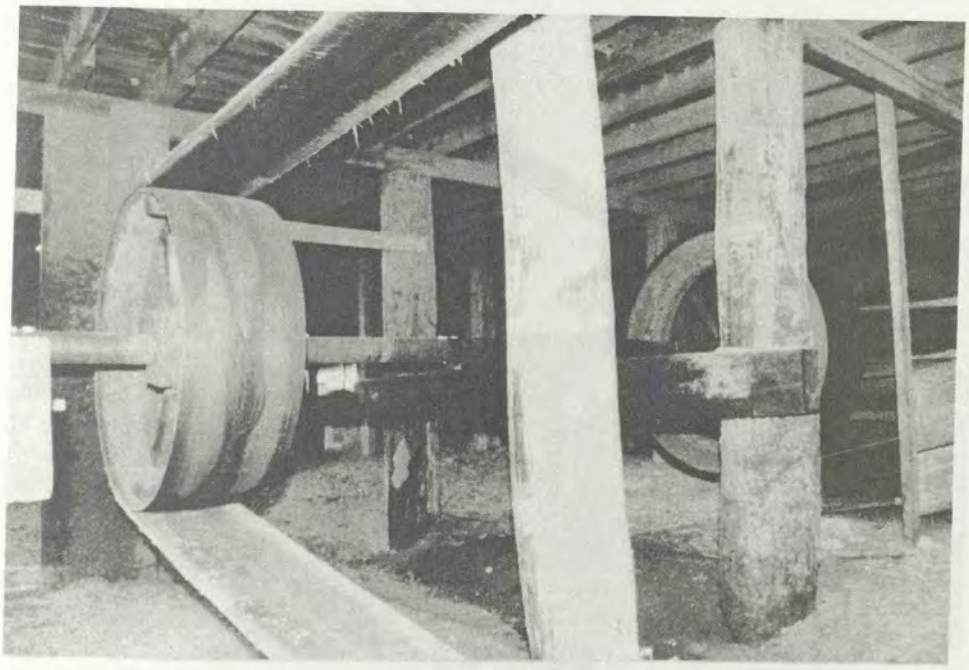
The main machinery of the mill, ie the boiler and the steam engine that drove the belts, controlled the operations of the mill, if either of these pieces of machinery broke down, or was shut down for maintenance or repairs, the mill ground to a halt. Men were laid off only infrequently, most being employed during these downtimes in maintenance of equipment or the stacking and stripping of sawn timber. Boiler breakdowns were not frequent but they certainly occurred. A log of events dating from 1968 is still in existence and from this document it is possible to calculate the hours the mill was working, the amount of timber cut and the number of stoppages from causes such as machinery breakdowns, vacations, public holidays or the shortage of logs.[6]

Some weeks were financial disasters for the owners of the mill, created through a combination of machinery breakdowns, the short supply of logs and even the advent of strikes. For example, according to the mill's daily cutting book that recorded the output of the mill from August 1974 to December 1976, the weeks of June 21 to 12 July were particularly challenging. Out of a total of sixteen working days, nine and a half days were lost because there were no



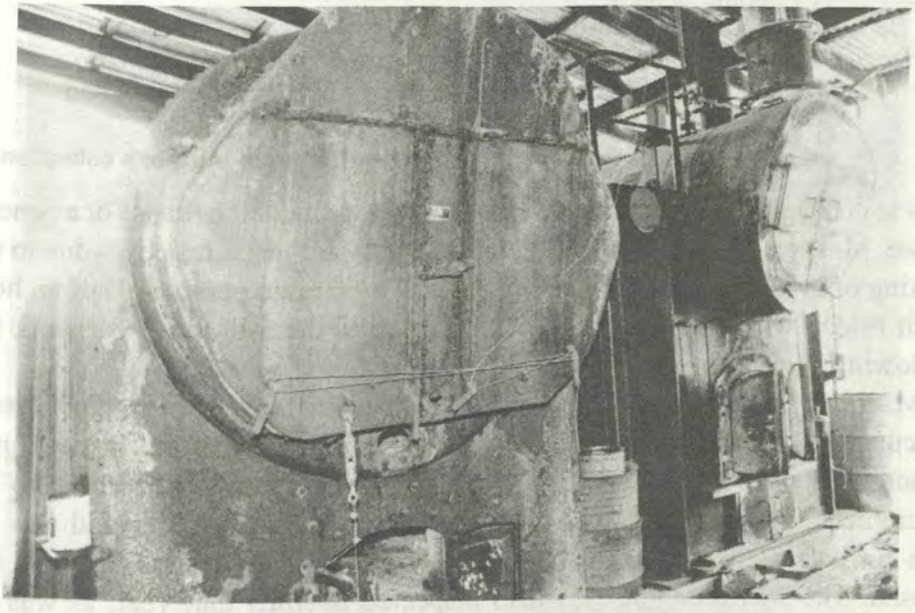
Flywheel of the main engine. Photographed December 1995

Source—Author's collection



The main drive belt. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection



The two boilers. The boiler in the foreground is no longer in use, the second boiler was purchased from the Kingaroy hospital. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

Burning area for waste sawdust and planing shavings. The corrugated iron fence was constructed to prevent sparks from the fire blowing back towards the mill where they would have created a fire danger. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

logs to cut, and a further day, 12 July, 1976, was written off because of a general strike. More hours were lost—although the mill still made money—due to the cutting of logs that were brought to the mill by private persons. Half an hour each Friday was set aside for the cleaning up of the mill ready for work the following Monday.[7]

Machinery at the mill had to be regularly checked by staff of the Division of Occupational Safety in Brisbane, this was a requirement of the Inspection of Machinery Act, 1951/1982. Periods of inspection varied according to the equipment. The mobile crane was inspected on 14 April, 1986, and was not due for a further inspection until 1988, but by then, of course, the mill had closed. The steam engine was also inspected in April that year, as was the 1814kg end loader fork lift.[8]

South-eastern side of the mill. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

Original chimney stack, now lying in the timber waste area. Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

Working and repair area beneath the mill. Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

Also beneath the mill there was a workshop where maintenance was carried out and where the saws were sharpened. An emery wheel and stand for saw sharpening were situated a few metres behind the main engine. Work benches were situated next to the saw-sharpening area.

Some equipment at the mill was hired. Evidence of this is suggested in a series of letters written to Wilson Hart in 1979 by Gerrard Strapping Systems, the Queensland manager of which was, at that time, attempting to locate a machine that had been hired to the mill at Elgin Vale but had subsequently disappeared. Machines appearing on a requisition receipt dated 14 March, 1979, include a strapping machine (rental $200), a tensioner ($35) a sealer ($26) and various other items such as dispensers and containers.[9]

Most of the maintenance for the engine and boiler, and also for other pieces of machinery, was generally carried out by staff at the mill, however, when particularly knotty problems occurred outside help was required and Maryborough engineer Peter Olds, of the long established firm of Wm. Olds and Sons Engineering, was frequently sent for.

In 1996 engineer Peter Olds wrote a detailed description of the mill and of

some of the work he carried out there. This description, which Mr Olds entitled, *Interlude at Elgin Vale* is reproduced below:

> Although our engineering firm had been repairing and making replacement parts for the mill for years, it was not until July 1982 that I visited the site for the first time. It was fairly early on a cold Sunday morning that I answered a knock at the front door to be confronted by Dave Neilson, maintenance engineer of many years' standing with Wilson Hart.
>
> Dave explained that he had been called back from holidays because of a problem with the Elgin Vale mill engine. He explained that the engine had developed a bad knock causing the mill to be stopped and all but a couple of the hands stood down. When Dave visited the mill the previous Friday, he arranged for the engine to be run with varying load conditions while trying to locate the cause of the problem, but without success.
>
> The reason for his visit on that July morning was to ask if I would go out with him early on Monday to see if we could find the trouble.
>
> On Sunday afternoon tools and equipment were prepared and loaded into the utility for an early start the next day. Prepared with cut lunches and a thermos or two of tea, we were away well before sun up for the two hours or so drive south-west ...
>
> Arriving at the mill we were met by Bob Mercer the manager and Warren Hockey the engine driver who had steam up so that we could run the engine. Bob and Warren would be able to put a log through the No. 1 bench to give the engine a load while Dave and I looked for the offending knock.
>
> After a cup of tea and warming ourselves near the boiler, we were into action. Working together it didn't take long to find that the 'bump' was caused by the flywheel keys being slack, allowing the crankshaft to work in the flywheel. Because of the amount of sawdust and grease about the engine it was difficult to see at first but once located, there was no doubt what the trouble was.
>
> The mill ... was cutting practically nothing else but virgin hoop pine of very good quality. Because of its value, it was cut down to the smallest sections as well as planks, leaving virtually nothing but sawdust waste to fuel the boiler. Because of this it was necessary to bring in bush wood for extra fuel for the boiler, an unusual thing for a country sawmill where there was normally plenty of waste timber.
>
> A general examination of the engine showed that she had evidently had a pretty hard life, the main bed casting was cracked in the area of

the cross-head guides, the back cylinder cover had evidently been smashed and was replaced with a steel one and the engine had been 'working' on the foundation. Bob Mercer also told us that the crankpin had come loose in the crank disc a short time back and now the flywheel was loose or 'working' on the crankshaft ...

Bob Mercer explained his fears about the situation to us, stating that he thought that if the engine couldn't be kept running, the mill would probably be closed. Single phase electricity only was coupled to the mill and nearby houses and the cost to install three phase and equipment to electrify the plant would not be met by the new owners. Bob, himself at retirement age, certainly had the good of the old mill and his crew at heart and wished the plant to continue operating.

As I got to know Bob Mercer better, I realised that he was as important to the mill as the engine and I doubt another man could be found to keep the old plant operating. I think these early country mill managers were a special breed with sawdust in their blood who could turn their hand to almost anything as well as 'keep the books'.

The mill itself was built on a gentle slope with the log pile on the top side where they could be easily loaded onto the No. 1 Canadian bench for breaking down into slabs. The machinery was all set up on a heavy timber floor which was well clear of the ground on the lower side of the mill. This gave clearance for the main drive 4" diameter countershaft under the floor with the flat belt drives coming up through the floor. When the mill was running the fast rotating large pulleys carrying flat belts disappearing up through the floor and the noise of the saws working above was something to experience. The drive to the countershaft was by a 14" wide heavy canvas-rubber composition belt.

The engine and boiler were at ground level on the down side of the mill closest to the creek. Water was usually pumped by a 'Worthington' duplex type steam pump from the creek to overhead tanks and to a large rectangular brick or concrete tank set in the ground near the engine. The top of this open tank was just at ground level and around it was erected a rough barricade. I was told that the men turned up for work one morning to find a lively steer in the tank. After breaking through the railings he was unable to get out. Every time I visited the mill, this deep tank seemed to be full to the brim. There were also two rainwater tanks for drinking purposes.

Very noticeable around the boiler and engine was the mixture of

smells from the steam and hot oil and the burning pine in the boiler furnace. In the mill itself above the floor was the clean sweet smell of the freshly cut hoop pine.

Viewed from a distance, the mill seemed to just fit into the landscape. Some of the buildings looked as old as many of the surrounding trees. An even, light smoke drifted from the tall chimney with a little cloud of steam from the engine exhaust. The 'knock off' whistle could be seen sticking out over the boiler house roof and when blown, echoed back through the bush. At the far end of the mill were many stacks of timber neatly stripped for air drying. The sawn timber was taken from the mill to the yard on trucks running on steel tramways.

Particulars I recorded at the time regarding the main engine are as follows:

Maker:

T. Robinson & Son Limited

Rochdale—England.

Bore 16", Stroke 30"

Split Type Flywheel 10'—6" diameter with 12" wide face carrying a 14" wide belt.

The rim of the flywheel was 10" deep, rather heavier than usual. The main drive to the mill was by the heavy 14" wide belt to a 4" diameter countershaft 33 feet from the engine crankshaft (or roughly 33 feet centres). The countershaft ran under the mill more or less on the same level as the engine. The flywheel ran in a pit deep enough to just give clearance for the belt gradually tapering up to ground level toward the countershaft. In wet weather this pit sometimes filled with water from soakage causing problems if not bailed out. Close to the engine was a collection of small and large circular saws, some newly ground and others in need of sharpening. There were also blades for the vertical frame saw which was never in use during my visits. The saw sharpening machinery and various tools and spares were also nearby, the engine driver often doubling as the saw doctor—while he sharpened saws, he was able to keep an eye on his charge.

Some information about the boiler might also be in order.

This was situated parallel with the engine bed and about eight feet away to give enough room for working. It also meant that the steam pipe was nice and short. The feed pump and injector were situated

on the engine side of the boiler so as to be handy for the engine driver who was also the boiler attendant.

The boiler was of the under fired multi-tubular type. With this design, the furnace is situated directly under the boiler shell or 'drum'. The hot gases from the fire pass towards the back and return through the many tubes to the smoke box at the front. The chimney, probably in the vicinity of 24" in diameter, rose from the top of the smoke box through the boiler house roof to a height of about 30 feet above it. The top of the chimney was covered by a round flat disc of steel plate which could be tilted as desired, thus opening the top of the chimney to control the draught for the fire. The disc or 'damper' was hinged at the top and to one side of the chimney and was controlled by a wire cable extending down through the roof. On the bottom end of the cable was fastened a short length of chain that afforded the operator a better grip and also enabled him to hook it on to a peg provided for that purpose.

At a safe distance in front of the boiler was usually a pile of green sawdust and small scraps of wood for firing. The sawdust was fed through the twin fire doors with a wide flat shovel or scoop and the scraps were picked up and thrown in by hand.

When firing with the damper well open thus creating a 'heavy' draught, a lot of the light sawdust was pulled straight off the shovel and burnt in suspension without landing on the grate. The ash pit under the grate was slightly below the surrounding floor. This contained the hot remains of the fire that fell through the grate during the course of the day. As the ashes built up it was necessary to rake out the pit and remove the contents by wheelbarrow to a safe dumping area. Immediately in front of the boiler had to be swept clean and free of sawdust for safety reasons. The finest layer covering the floor and coming in contact with the heat of the ash pit could soon start to smoulder and spread slowly towards the heaped fuel supply.

Under the mill on the tops of all the beams and timbers, and indeed on anything that remained stationary for long, there was a build up of the finest bone-dry sawdust that could easily ignite with the smallest spark. Fire in a sawmill is an ever-present danger and there were a few charred timbers near the boiler at Elgin Vale that 'told a tale'.

A small engine-driven fire pump to draw water from the creek was kept handy, it also served to fill the boiler water supply tanks on occasions. When the boiler was cold (e.g. during the Christmas

shutdown) the mill was quite dead. When the fire was again lit and steam slowly raised, the little leaks here and there indicated she was coming alive again.

A story regarding the boiler related by Dave Neilson is worth repeating. It occurred when Dick Collard was the manager ... It was during the normal shutdown period when as well as work on the boiler and in the mill was being carried out, the chimney was receiving a fresh coat of paint.

This precarious job was being performed by a steeplejack ... who specialised in such work, travelling near and far in this unusual trade. The steeplejack who was a short slightly built man was known as a bit of a 'hard case'.

While up at the top of the chimney, he thought he would 'have a go' at the boys out of sight down below. He was actually sitting on the damper, possibly having a smoke, when he yelled out, 'Open the damper.' He apparently saw the wire being tugged by someone who must have wondered why it was stuck. Then again from above came the instruction, 'Give it a bloody good pull.' The commotion and yells that were heard from aloft by the men in the boiler house gave them a surprise as well. The steeplejack hadn't reckoned on the might and muscle of the manager of Elgin Vale who managed to open the damper as commanded and nearly threw him off his perch ...

After cleaning up around the flywheel boss which was approximately 18" long we managed to extract the two tapered gib head keys. These were driven one from each side of the boss into the same long keyway in the crankshaft. Wear in the keys and keyways was immediately evident.

The only remedy at the time was to refit the keys with shims. Before doing so, all particulars were taken to make new oversize keys on our return to Maryborough, these to be fitted as soon as possible on another visit.

With the old keys fitted temporarily and the flywheel made as tight as possible, all was prepared for a test run with the engine being turned to the usual 'starting position'. With the cylinder drain cocks open, Warren, the driver, opened the throttle and the engine moved off but did not start. To my surprise the piston came to near the end of its first stroke and actually bounced back in reverse after having what I considered plenty of speed in the big flywheel to carry over the end of the stroke. Warren cursed himself for 'not giving her

enough' and to my query said that 'she often did that'. After setting in the start position again and a bit more initial steam she was away. Bob Mercer and Warren proceeded up top and put a heavy log through the Canadian bench while Dave and I watched and listened to the engine. The knock was gone.

We packed up our tools and returned to Maryborough promising to make new oversize keys and to fit them in the near future. It was not until the next week that we returned to the mill as the engine continued to run well for a couple of days but the knock gradually returned. During this time I gave considerable thought to the damage to the engine already mentioned as well as this latest problem of the flywheel coming loose. I also thought about the way the engine failed to start on that first attempt I witnessed. This was the clue.

When Dave and I made the next visit with the new keys and tools to fit them, I also took a small sheet of thin plywood, some off-cuts of handy size dressed pine from our pattern shop and a few woodworking tools.

Arriving at the mill we removed the main drive belt so that we could more easily turn the engine over, usually by standing inside the flywheel or sitting on the spokes. While Dave started to fit the new flywheel keys, Warren and I removed the steam chest cover to expose the slide valve, also often referred to as a 'D valve'. This one single casting controls the admission of steam from the steam chest to both ends of the cylinder as well as the exhausting of the same steam after its work has finished in the cylinder. This single component works by sliding against a flat face from which a port or passage leads to each end of the cylinder and a third or central larger ports to the engine exhaust pipe. Slide valves are made with a recess or exhaust cavity in the face which slides over the port leads in the cylinder steam chest. With the valve being driven by any one of the many types of drive mechanisms or 'valve gears' across the port face a surprising number of events occur.

The actual dimensions or lengths of the valve by which it controls the flow of the steam through the ports is most important. I had a hunch that this valve was at fault by closing off the exhaust too early causing undue compression at the ends of the stroke.

With a valve in its working position it is easy to witness the sequence of events in relation to steam being admitted to one or the other end of the cylinder, but not so the exhaust. The exhaust events

are controlled by the exhaust cavity in the back or underside of the valve and this cannot be seen under normal circumstances. When the suspect valve was removed a rough check with a rule confirmed my feelings that there was too much exhaust 'lap' which would cause undue compression of steam at the end of the stroke. Explained simply, the flow of exhaust steam from each end of the cylinder was 'cut off' too early instead of being allowed to escape to the atmosphere through the exhaust pipe. The steam thus trapped in the cylinder was compressed to a high pressure as the piston came to each end of its stroke.

At this point I produced the small sheet of ply etc., and proceeded to make a part dummy or skeleton valve that could be placed on the valve driving spindle. The piece of ply was cut exactly to the same length as the old valve and an opening the same length and in the same position was cut to represent the exhaust cavity. When this was set in position and the engine turned over, we could immediately *see* what was happening with both the admission as well as the exhausting of steam from the engine cylinder.

It was shown that the exhaust was cut off 5" before the end of the stroke on the crankshaft end of the cylinder and 6" before at the opposite or outer end. I was sure that here was the cause of the loose flywheel and the earlier troubles experienced. On closer examination the piston rod also showed signs of undue heat and Bob Mercer stated that the gland on the piston rod was difficult to keep steam tight—this was further proof.

The remedy I suggested was to make a new valve. This meant first making a pattern then a casting and finally machining it. Such a job would mean a longer stoppage for the mill as well as the expense incurred.

My suggestion caused looks of worry on the faces of my friends, after all, the engine had been working since 1906 or thereabouts. (There were suggestions that the engine was used elsewhere prior to being set up at Elgin Vale). It is at times like this that one gets the feeling that others might think that one is trying to make work for oneself.

After further discussion Bob Mercer phoned head office in Brisbane to explain the position and get instruction. He soon returned from his office with the words 'go ahead'.

I then phoned my brother Bill at our works in Maryborough and

asked if it could be arranged for our pattern maker Bill Baxter to work on the new pattern that night. After further work and adjustment to the plywood skeleton to give the dimensions desired, Dave and I packed up and headed for home. Bill Baxter completed the pattern for the valve to the new dimensions the same night and it was cast in our foundry the next day and immediately machined on the working face ready to be fitted.

It was an early morning start for Dave and I again as we headed off with the new valve prepared for an overnight stay at Nanango.

On arrival at the mill we proceeded to 'clean up' by hand the port face in the cylinder in order to get a good seating of the valve and also to finish the final fitting of the new flywheel keys.

In the meantime, Warren was gradually getting up steam in the boiler ready to run. Incidentally I recall that Warren himself was looking a bit the 'worse for wear' that day. He was sporting a couple of cuts and bruises about the face as the result of a fight. It appears that he came to the rescue of a young lady at a dance over the weekend who was having trouble with another couple of young chaps.

Warren assured us that they would have looked and felt a lot worse than he did.

We believed him.

With everything completed and reassembled, the steam valve was cracked and the engine rolled over freely without load. Next, with no little effort, we refitted the 14" main drive belt to the flywheel and with a near full head of steam prepared for a load test.

The moment of truth had arrived.

After setting the engine in her normal starting position all was ready. With the throttle valve cracked open slightly again the great flywheel moved off gently and evenly gradually increasing in speed until the governor took control. Just outside the mill building there was the very even soft puff of the exhaust from the 6" diameter exhaust pipe. A few stops and starts were made with smiles all around, the engine seemed to run so much more smoothly and start so easily. She ran like a steam engine should with no sign of stalling on starting up.

Bob and Warren soon had a big log on the carriage of the Canadian bench again ready for a heavy cut to test the old engine under load conditions. I stood near the outlet of the exhaust pipe while Dave was nearby when we heard the twin saws biting into the pine log

above. As the load was felt the sensitive governor control opened up and the soft puff of the exhaust turned into almost a savage bark as the even beat indicated to me what the engine was doing. On hearing the cut finish the gentle puff again resumed, the new valve was 'doing its stuff'. It was thrilling to hear the engine so responsive.

Bob said that he had booked us into a motel in Nanango for the night and also that he had arranged for his full crew to start work the next morning. We would then be able to further check and see the engine tested under greater loads.

It being well into the afternoon, we packed up our tools and called it a day after making such an early start.

The next morning by the time we booked out and got on the road back to the mill, the men would have been well and truly at work. This was the scene we expected to see when we drove over the last rise and the mill came into view below. Dave and I were both silent as we got nearer and noticed that the damper cap was closed right down on top of the chimney and there was a cloud of steam coming out from under the boiler house roof, obviously from the safety valve being well and truly open.

This was almost a certain indication that the mill had stopped, the surplus build up of steam was escaping and the boiler fire was shut back.

Dave's first words were, 'Well mate, it looks as though we will have to get our overalls on again.' We both had the same thoughts.

However, to our surprise when we got closer we could see the movement of men and machinery in full gear as normal. Gradually winding our way in the ute down to near the boiler and engine, we spotted Bob Mercer with a grin from ear to ear. His greeting was: 'This job will do me now, it's a real holiday firing the boiler.' In spite of his bruises and aches, Warren was up in the mill helping the other hands make up for lost time.

At the start of the day the fire in the boiler furnace had been well built up as had always been the practice, but now with the new valve fitted, the engine used far less steam than previously. This resulted in the damper having to be closed but still the safety valve lifted. As the roar of escaping steam from the valve subsided the steady throb of the even exhaust from the engine could again be heard. The throb increasing as the governor opened up with load and then diminishing to the soft puff. The old engine was now running much more freely

and sounded as though she enjoyed the work she was doing. The mill hands said they had much more power than before with plenty to spare even on a lower boiler pressure.

Dave and I stayed on for a couple of hours more and 'boiled up' before heading back to Maryborough with that satisfied feeling of a job well done ...

Thereafter I made a number of visits to Elgin Vale to carry out jobs in other areas of the mill as well as further work on the engine. When the mill ceased cutting for the year and all hands went on leave, Bob usually posted the key of his office to me. This gave us access to his telephone should we need it.

It was usually arranged for us to make a quick trip soon after the mill closed and dismantle and remove the various parts requiring attention and return with them to Maryborough. We would go back to the mill and reassemble the gear the day before start-up and stay overnight to make sure everything was satisfactorily in operation the next day.

I recall that we made and fitted a new crankpin and big end bearing to the engine and during the Christmas 1985 shutdown, we made and fitted a new oversize piston and rings. During one of the maintenance trips we took the opportunity to more thoroughly fit and tighten the flywheel on the crankshaft. I always tried to take different members of our staff with me to have the experience at the old mill.

Warren Hockey was always the first of the mill hands to show up. He lived at Manumbar about 5 miles away. He used to ride his motor bike over in the afternoon to 'light up' and get ready for work the next day. It wouldn't be long before one could hear the soft whistle of air through the grate and the gaps around the fire doors as the boiler and chimney warmed up and the draught increased.

These were the very first signs of the mill starting to wake up. It was indeed pleasing to hear from Bob that the small scraps and sawdust were now all that was necessary to fire the boiler. He had no need to get in extra wood as the engine used so little steam after the fitting of the new valve.

My last visit to the mill while it was still working was to make a template and get details to make a new multi 'V' grooved fibre friction wheel for one of the bench feeds. At the time we had with us two visitors from Michigan, USA. Bob Huxtable was nearly 90 years of

age and Len Selden was somewhat younger. (Incidentally Len's grandfather was the famous George Selden of the 'Selden Patent' fame. He had patented the motor car and after a long court battle Henry Ford won the case, overturning it).

This was an ideal chance to give our visitors a look at the real Australia outside the cities. The mill was working in full flight and the scene which met our American friends' eyes was almost unbelievable to them amid the scream of the various saws, a log being broken down, the slabs going on to be quickly fed through the next bench etc., flying sawdust, with machinery, flitches of timber and trolleys moving in every direction.

The thing that impressed them most was that with all this movement, not a word was spoken. The men were working as a well-trained team all knowing what to do and what to expect from his mates. They could also see the danger in all this din, especially with the men riding on the steel plated carriage helping guide the logs through the saws. At times they certainly looked to be too close for comfort to the two vicious blades on spindles mounted more or less one above the other.

Down below the faithful old Robinson engine was making it all happen.

After a brief stop to make the template during the lunch break we headed for home towards threatening clouds on the sultry afternoon. Our friend Bob Lisle was also with us that day, having worked in the timber industry in his earlier life until he became a paraplegic as a result of an accident with a log over thirty years ago.

We were soon driving in heavy rain as the storm broke and our friends expressed disappointment at not seeing much native wildlife. The rain let up as we approached Miva Station and a quick detour in there gave them the sight of more wallabies and kangaroos of all colours and sizes than they could imagine.

Regarding native wildlife, I was always very wary of snakes when at the old mill especially in the heat at Christmas time during the quiet shut down period. With all of the timber and discarded machinery about, it looked like a haven for snakes when all was still. I saw only one large brown at the side of the road near where it crosses the creek approaching the mill, it quickly disappeared into the long grass.

Returning from Elgin Vale on our various visits we usually brought

back as much of the beautiful pine as we could carry in the utility. Although kauri pine is usually more favoured for pattern making, Bill Baxter has found that the hoop pine that was being cut there at the time was particularly stable and not prone to cracking. On the closure of the mill, Bill and I made a special trip to purchase a full load in short lengths for our pattern shop. Indeed, we still have some. We also still have the new valve pattern as well as the old valve and a spare piston ring which was made in case one was broken when being fitted. Photographs taken during the first couple of visits are now a reminder of the whole episode.

Yes, we do get some interesting jobs and we get to meet a lot of nice people. As with some other machines I can still picture and hear the old Elgin Vale engine working. I think of the men (and their wives who stood by them) who designed, built and installed them. Also the difficulties that must have been experienced in transporting such heavy equipment over the bush tracks in the early days. Without doubt, they too would have gained pleasure and satisfaction when all of their efforts came together and worked as intended. The mechanism in some steam engines has often been described as 'poetry in motion'.

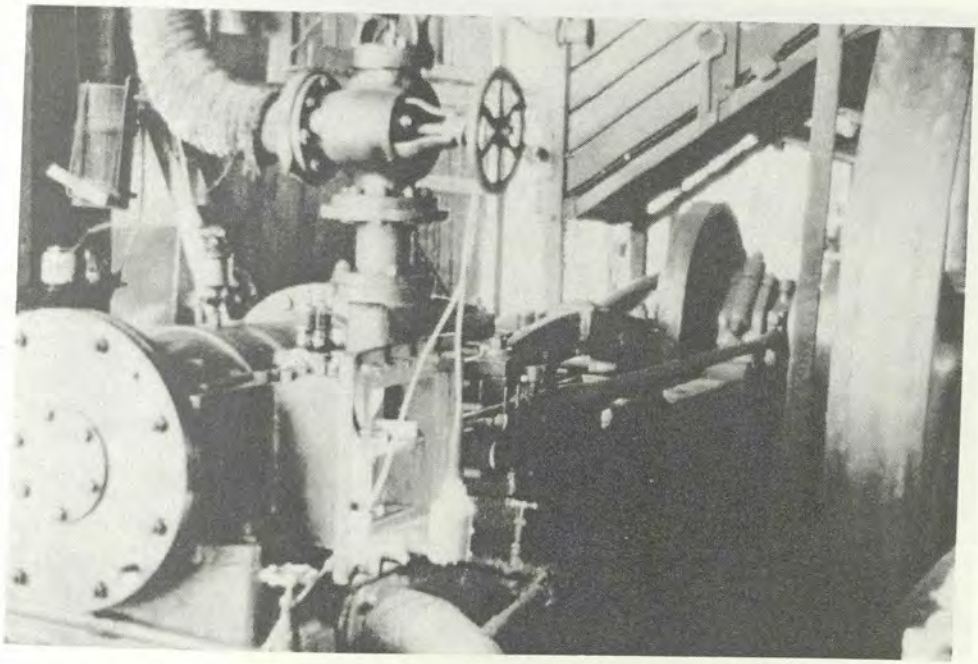
I also believe that the exhaust beat of good old engines, especially when heard within sight of them working, is a form of music to the ears. At times they almost seem alive and reflect those responsible for them now and those who have gone before ...

Only thirteen years have passed since my first visit to Elgin Vale but during that period many changes have occurred ...

With the passing of the steam-driven sawmills so too has passed the valuable training ground for people in industry. Today, by the pressing of a button, operators have instant power at their command and instead of being burnt, the wood waste is turned into chips to be used for other purposes. The power in this country of course, comes mostly from the burning of coal, one of the non-renewable fossil fuels in power station boilers ...

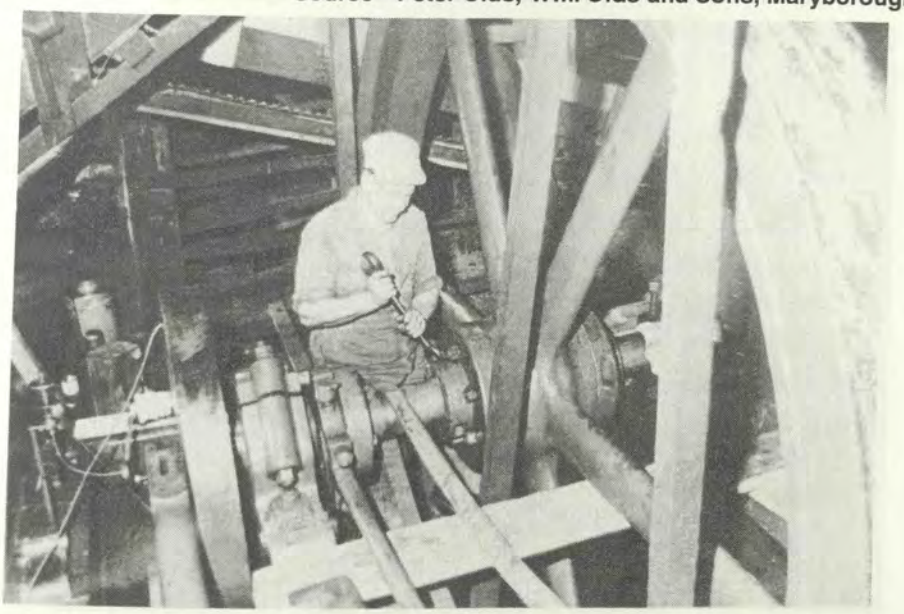
Gone are those small country sawmills with the familiar smoke stack through the boiler house roof. Gone also are many of the opportunities where people could grasp the basic knowledge of the power source of steam in a working environment.[10]

The output of the mill was regulated by a number of factors, the availability of logs, the weather, the frequency of machinery breakdowns, public holidays,



Showing steam chest cover removed and skeleton valve in position. Sawdust chute in background. 1982.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

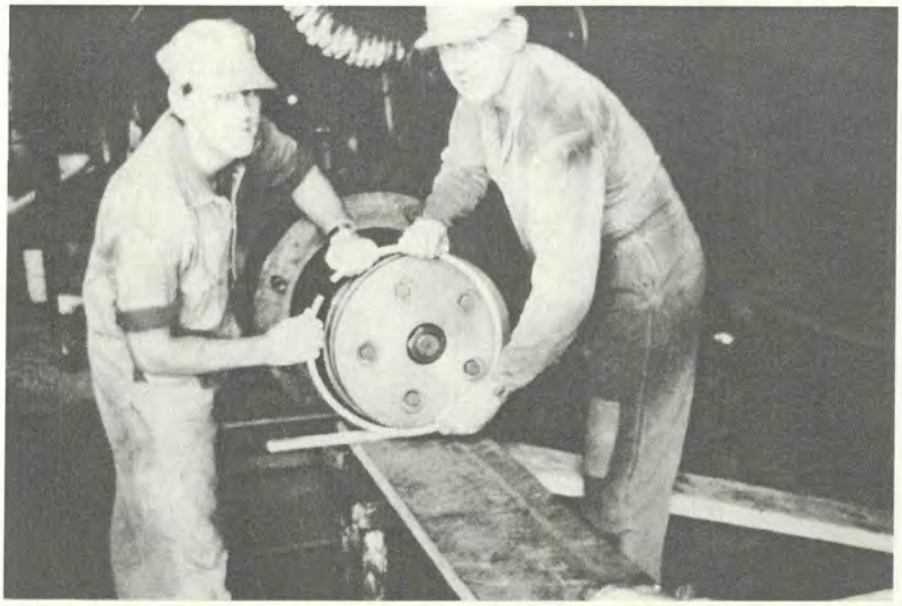


A new big end bearing and crankpin were fitted to the engine and the flywheel was checked on the crankshaft. January, 1984.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

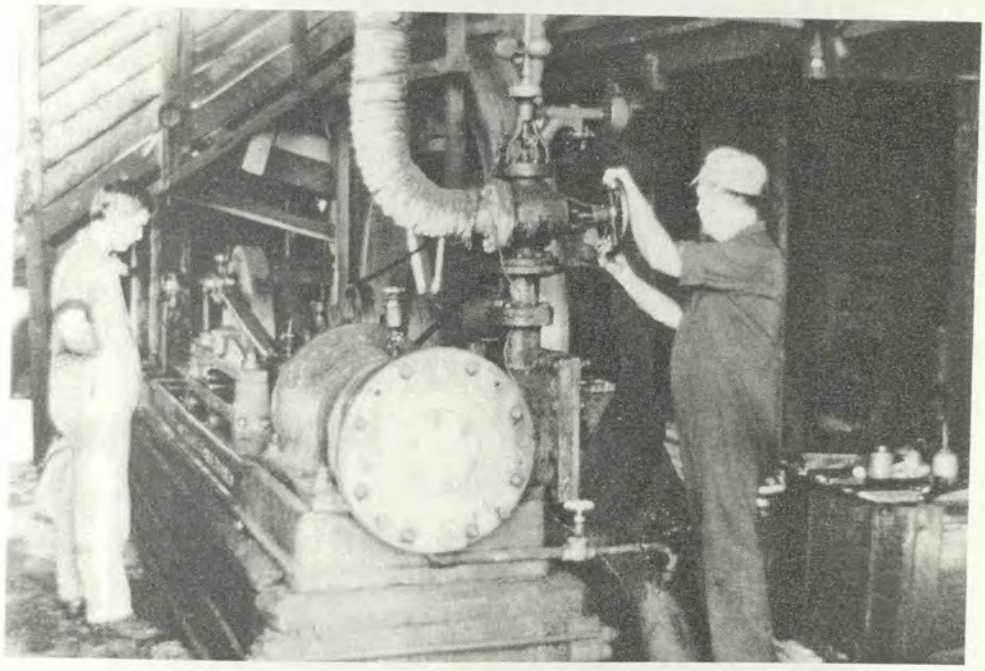
Alan Johnston cleaning out the bore prior to fitting a new piston and rings. January, 1986.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds Engineering, Maryborough



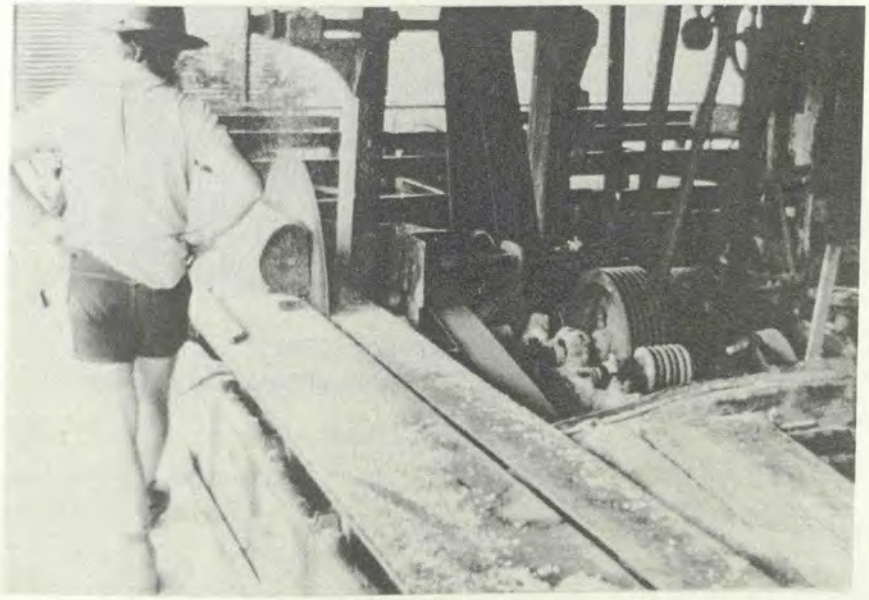
John Petersen and Alan Johnston fitting piston rings to a new piston prior to assembly. January, 1986.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough



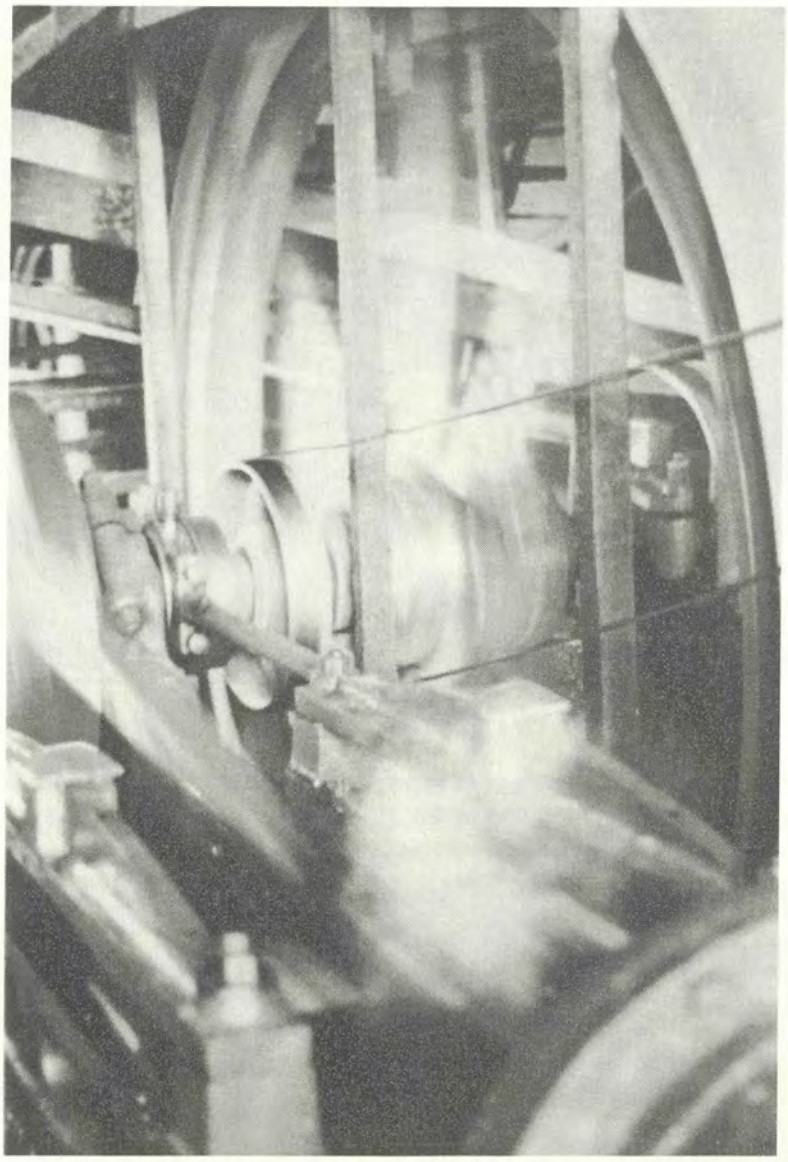
Starting up for a test run after fitting a new piston and rings, John Petersen, third year apprentice, standing at left, Peter Olds on throttle. January, 1986.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough



A small log going through the breaking down bench, only the bottom saw is in place for this log. January, 1986.

Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough



The steam engine in motion. January, 1986.
Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

the efficiency of mill management and the number of employees. Superficial feet output from the mill varied tremendously from as little as 5000 superficial feet per day to 23,000 superficial feet. Curiously, the output seemed to diminish on the days after holidays and on Mondays.[11]

In addition to the various pieces of machinery used in the mill and external to it, especially for the purpose of moving timber, the mill had a company vehicle, a 1980 model Valiant station wagon registration number 564 NSO, this was for the manager's use and, according to a letter written by Bob Mercer in December 1982 to the general manager of Laheys Wood Products (the division of Carricks which then owned the mill) the vehicle was driven only by him.[12]

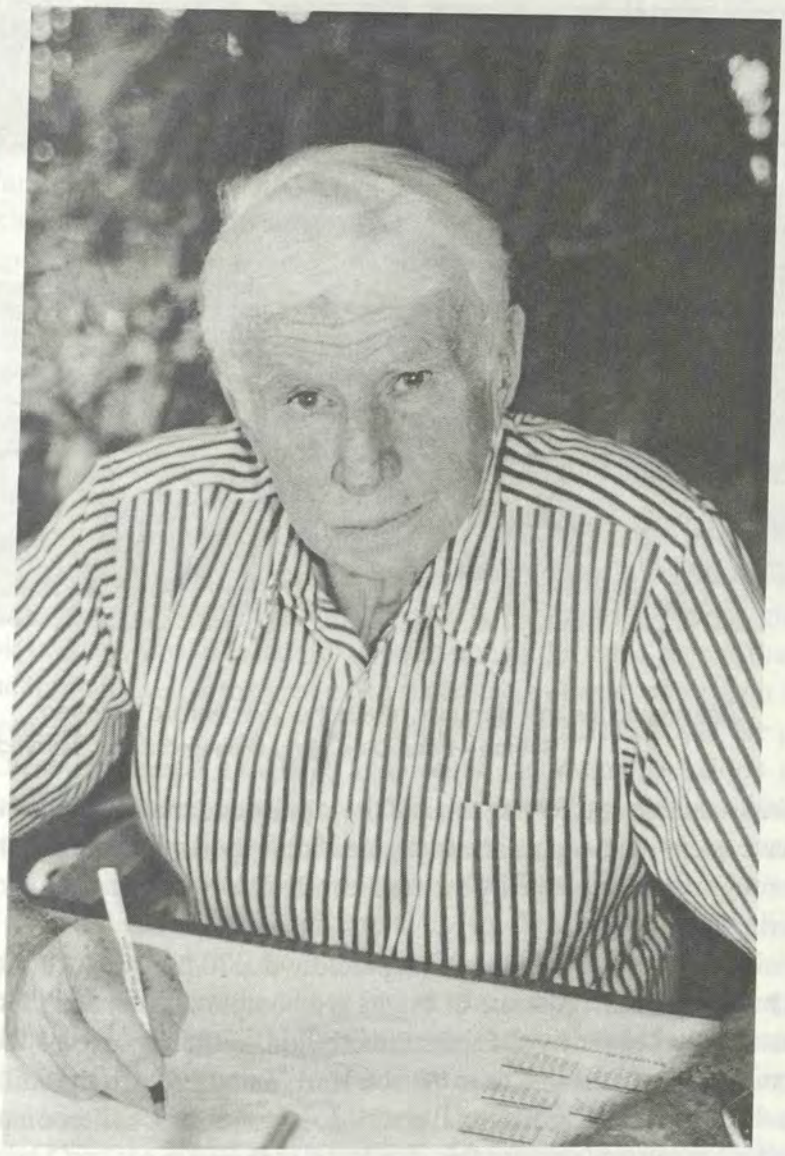
Chapter Nine

The Carricks' Takeover and Subsequent Decline

As we have seen, the mill at Elgin Vale was owned, and had been owned by Wilson Hart of Maryborough since 1927. Compared to other mills owned by this company, the Elgin Vale mill was something of the poor country cousin. It was smaller than most, it operated with antiquated machinery, it was in a remote location, staff were difficult to recruit, and due to these abnormalities it was considered by the Wilson Hart hierarchy to be of slightly lesser importance. Yet the mill was always a profitable venture and the management of the parent company in Maryborough went to considerable lengths to ensure that it remained so.

Former general manager of Wilson Hart, Harold Marshall, said:

> The Elgin Vale operation was run by a father, (Dick Collard) who, when he retired, passed it onto his son, (Ivan) who was his foreman, and the men who worked ... (at the mill), worked there virtually all their lives, they started there as sixteen year olds or seventeen, eighteen year olds and worked there like that. They never had any trouble, it was a steam mill, probably one of the oldest mills, it was working on a hoop pine basis and the hoop pine was in that area and they were good logs and the old steam mill used to cut them up and cut perfect timber. The timber that was cut from Elgin Vale was always in demand, we never had any surplus stocks from Elgin Vale and never had any worry of disposal, so consequently Elgin Vale was a very, very good and profitable little mill as far as our company was concerned. Never in my time from 1965 through to 1980 did they ever show a loss, so that speaks for Elgin Vale and the men who ran the mill. When Carricks took over the mill Dick Collard left ... They were very capable men, as capable men as I've ever run into running a mill. Over a period of a lot of years Wilson Harts had a very strict policy of training men, getting good men and retaining those men ... and consequently we had a very excellent staff relationship, and these people who worked at Elgin Vale had no facilities (compared to) the people at Townsville Rockhampton and Mackay (who) had good facilities, and Theodore, Eidsvold, places like that, they had homes provided with electricity, (but) at Elgin Vale they had very little, we couldn't supply very much, they were virtually living in the

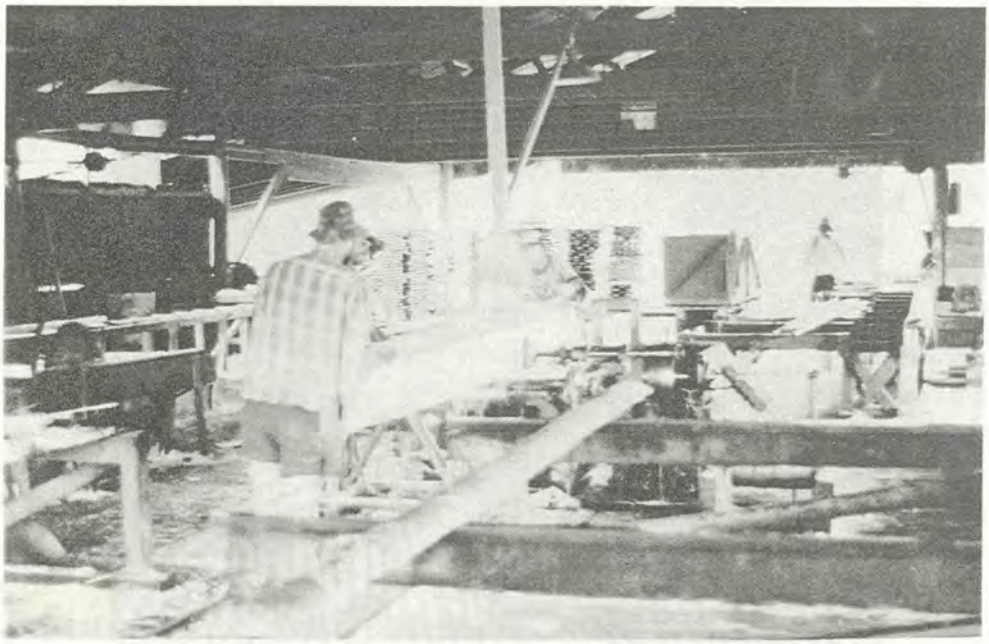


Harold Marshall, former general manager of Wilson Hart, Maryborough, Photographed December 1995.

Source—Author's collection

bush ... I have a very great respect for every man who ever worked in it.[1]

Harold Marshall states that the people at Elgin Vale during that time were very much autonomous, they cared for the mill and its machinery as they saw



View inside the mill. January, 1986, the year before it closed.
Source—Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough

fit and were capable of effecting most of the repairs and maintenance, although, as we have seen, in some instances engineering experts such as Peter Olds of Maryborough were occasionally sent to the mill to solve any particularly tricky engineering problems.

The mill at Elgin Vale was closed, reportedly due to the lack of timber in the region, but the precise sequence of events is a complex issue, and there is little doubt that the takeover by Carricks directly led to the closure of the Wilson Hart company. Up until that time Wilson Hart, and therefore the mill at Elgin Vale, had been in a strong financial position, it was a rock solid company with considerable assets and perhaps this stability was the reason why Carricks found the Wilson Hart group to be such an attractive takeover proposition. Yet the move to purchase the Wilson Hart company was the beginning of the end for Carricks. In its 1978 annual report to staff, company management claimed:

> A major expansion of the Group occurred in 1978 when, after lengthy negotiations, the shareholders of the old established Wilson Hart and Co. Limited accepted our offer to buy their shares and it has now become a member of the Carricks Group.
>
> Wilson Hart operated a number of sawmills, (Elginvale, Maryborough, Eidsvold, Theodore and Moura) plus timber yards and facilities to manufacture engineered products at Gladstone,

> Rockhampton, Mackay and Townsville. Additionally there are partly owned sawmills at Builyan, Biggenden and Gayndah.
>
> Activities have been slightly rationalised based on the Group's marketing ability, so that the mills at Elginvale and Maryborough became a part of the Wood Products Division. The rest of the Wilson Hart operations now are known as the Wilson Hart Division, joining existing operating Divisions of Furniture, Merchandise and Wood products as the Group's trading arms.
>
> Supported by the Corporate Division (Head Office and Computer) these trading divisions are spread from Cairns to Melbourne, and as far west as Moura and Goondiwindi. This latter operation, which consists of a cypress pine mill, also joined the Group in 1978 and a warm welcome is extended to the employees of our two newest members ... [2]

However, despite the evident enthusiasm with which the above message was delivered to the staff of Carricks in 1978, the chairman of the group, Sir Roderick Proctor, was also careful to point out, in the same report, that for the first time in many years the group had sustained a considerable drop in profit for the year, adding: ' ... Last year I mentioned the difficulties of the past few years. These continued into 1978 and despite the strenuous efforts made to surmount the problems encountered, the year's profit result probably fairly reflects the climate that prevailed in the industries in which we operate.'[3]

Sales for the year of the takeover totalled $35.7 million, which included the sales of Wilson Hart Ltd. from late October. Yet the profits had, 'fallen dramatically' to $1,273,000 from $1,607,000 for the previous year.[4]

As we have seen from the above report, the Carricks group was split into five distinct divisions at that time, Corporate, Furniture, Merchandise, Wood Products (under which Elgin Vale was listed) and Wilson Hart. The Elgin Vale mill came under the direct control of Laheys Timber Merchants and saw-millers, a division of Carricks, which was based at Railway Terrace in Corinda, Brisbane. Contrary to popular belief the Elgin Vale mill did not come under the Wilson Hart division of Carricks.

According to statistics supplied with the 1978 report there were twelve people employed at Elgin Vale at the time of the report, 191 people employed in the Wilson Hart Division and the Carricks group as a whole employed 1,236 people.[5]

The sequence that led to the closure of Wilson Hart and therefore the mill at Elgin Vale is best explained by Mr Harold Marshall, former general manager

Forklift with a pine log outside Elgin Vale sawmill Thursday 16 March, 1987.
Photographed by Bev Hockey

of Wilson Hart, who was interviewed for this history at Maryborough on the morning of 11 December, 1995.

Harold Marshall took over as company secretary of Wilson Hart in 1965 and was promoted to general manager in 1975. He remained in that position until 1982 when he left the company to retire in July that year, thus he was closely involved with the company of Carricks which subsequently became the owners of Wilson Hart and therefore also owned the mill at Elgin Vale.

Mr Marshall, whose memory of the events is particularly lucid, recalls:

> You have to realise that the pine resources at Elgin Vale were not as large as the other mills, so consequently if any mill was coming to the end of its life, possibly it was Elgin Vale. Every time Dick Collard (mill manager) said we're getting close to finishing this patch of timber now, with the (regeneration) cycle we worked on, we couldn't go back to that area for a number of years, but the Forestry would always come up with another patch that hadn't been touched, probably farther away, longer haulage, the cutting and snigging more costly.

Warren Hockey, Thursday 16 March, 1987.
Photographed by Bev Hockey

We never put any staff off at Elgin Vale during my years, as we had to go farther (for logs) it was becoming quite obvious that that type of pine, particularly the hoop pine, was becoming more valuable, and we were able to charge more, if we had more expense in getting it we could charge more.

Wilson Hart was subject to several takeover offers, and ... the successful bidder was Carricks Ltd of Brisbane who made a bid for the whole of the shares in Wilson Hart's and in consequence were able to take the company over. They ... amalgamated Wilson Hart's with Carricks. Carricks themselves were later taken over in about 1984, I think it was Industrial Resources and Technologies Ltd., who further broke the company up and they in turn were either taken over or had certain of their assets distributed to other companies, until the whole of the enterprise was all integrated with other companies ... Carricks' board meeting in Brisbane, led by Sir Roderick Proctor at the time, had come up to Maryborough and said that the takeover of the Wilson Hart's company would be beneficial

Last day of cutting at Elgin Vale Mill Thursday 16 March, 1987.
Photographed by Bev Hockey

to everybody in Maryborough. What he didn't say was that he felt that it was going to be beneficial by selling a lot of the assets, for instance we (Wilson Hart's) had purchased three properties which contained a mammoth amount of trees, thousands of acres of trees, absolutely perfect spotted gums, together with a lot of pine, which we maintained we would keep in perpetuity, only taking out those trees that were fully matured and leaving the trees that were part grown to grow to the full maturity of the tree. Carricks sold those off as rapidly as they could, they closed the Maryborough mill and sold the assets and the milling material and milling machinery to other people, that was their first step, the second step was, in lots of cases, to get rid of the branches, the timber branches, our sales outlets, through Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Gladstone, and then any of our hardware sections were to become amalgamated with Campbells which was a subsidiary of the main Carricks company. The subsidiaries were then amalgamated, I understand, with BBC, or some similar hardware acquired some of them. Some of our employees were integrated with those companies ... These sorts of

Elgin Vale sawmill with steam discharging from the steam feed on number one bench.

Photographed by Bev Hockey

> things started to affect the company, the running of the company, the profitability of the company, and it also badly affected Carricks' profits ... Carricks, for the first time in (its) history, after they had taken us over, did not make a profit overall, the only profitable enterprise was Wilson Hart's.[6]

The Carricks' takeover of Wilson Hart in 1978 was at first resisted by the shareholders of the Maryborough company. Former company general manager Harold Marshall recalls that the first offer was $1.90 per share. Company directors were able to negotiate further until they achieved a price of $1.95 per share, each share had originally cost $1, and consequently the shareholders believed that they were receiving more than a fair price for their holdings, especially so as the company had frequently returned good dividends.

Bob Mercer, the last manager of Elgin Vale, states that the main reason the mill was closed was due to the lack of timber supplies. He recalls that after he

had been advised of the lack of timber the end of the mill was clearly in sight. Mr Mercer recalls: 'I don't think we ran for twelve months after that, we were running short of timber, in fact we were buying timber, we'd run out of our allocation, I doubt if we ran for twelve months after receipt of that letter, they advised the company by letter and they (company management) came up and I read the letter. I knew it wouldn't go too much longer, that was obvious.'[7]

Mr Mercer did not tell the men that the mill's allocations had expired but when it became evident that the mill could not be saved he informed them that it was to close. The news was received by the men with much disappointment. Mr Mercer recalls that the last day the mill was in operation was Thursday 16 March, 1987. On that day Mr Mercer put the last log through the mill. Some of the men considered that it might have been possible to purchase the mill and to keep it in operation using plantation pine. However, after discussions had taken place it was believed that the venture could have been too risky. Mr Mercer recalls: 'I spoke to three or four about it, but there's a lot involved. Even to buy plantation pine you've got to have a certain amount of money in there (as a guarantee deposit with the Forestry Department), depending upon the quantity of logs, thirty or forty thousand dollars, maybe more, that's got to sit there all the time, and you've still got to pay for your purchases, it wasn't really an option we could take lightly.'[8]

Unfortunately, company reports regarding the closure, and therefore details of the closure for that year are not available, having been destroyed when Wilson Hart was also finally closed down.[9] According to Bob Mercer at the time of its closure the mill was employing eleven men and was processing an average of twenty cubic metres of logs each day.[10] Over the years many of the surrounding cottages succumbed to white ants and the Queensland Museum took possession of some of the mill's original machinery.[11]

Chapter Ten

A New Lease of Life

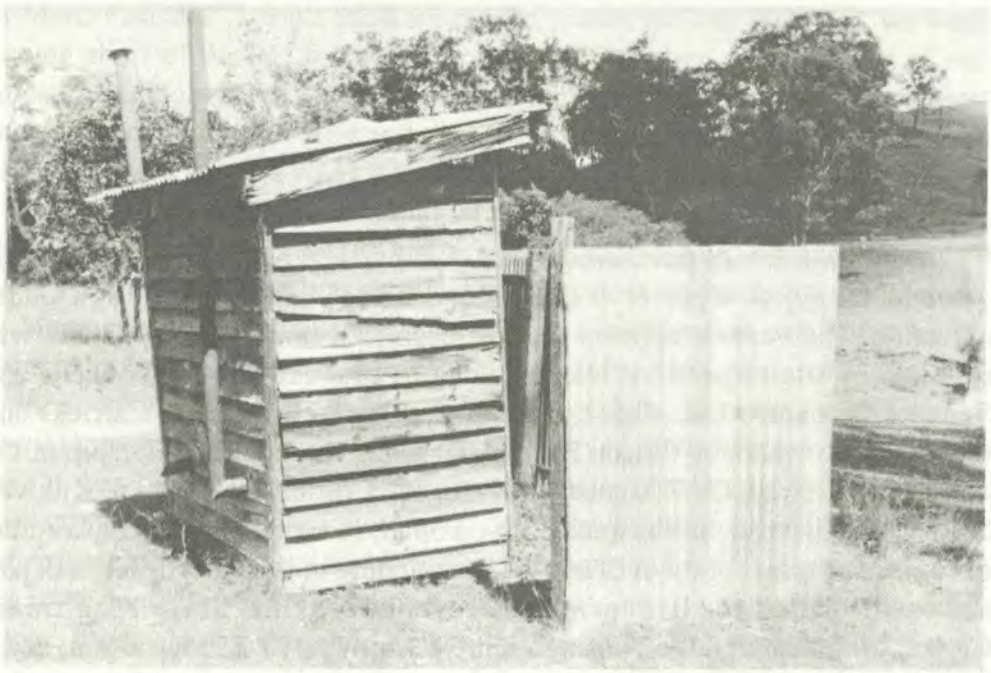
The mill was finally purchased by the Nanango and Kilkivan Shire Councils with the object of preserving its history and opening up the site as a tourist attraction. The venture appears to have been first mooted in 1987 and was followed by site inspections and negotiations between the two councils and Sunstate Resources Ltd, who, by that time, were the owners of Carricks and thus also the owners of Wilson Hart, under whose name the ownership of the mill was registered. On 7 August, 1987, Ray C. Currie, shire clerk of Kilkivan Shire Council, wrote to Sunstate's sub-company, Carricks Pty Ltd at Corinda, to confirm an offer for the mill and the surrounding buildings. His letter in part states: 'Further to discussions held between the Shire Chairman, Cr A.F. McIntosh and the Nanango Shire Chairman, Cr R. McCallum, and a subsequent inspection of such premises today, I wish to confirm this council's offer of $8000 for the purchase of the houses and ancillary equipment at the Elgin Vale Mill.'[1] The letter went on to stipulate that the purchase price did not include such equipment as the steel framed shed then on site, a Case endloader and tools, the crane and tools, and various other pieces of miscellaneous equipment including chainsaws, office equipment and the sawn timber then stacked in the yard.[2]

On the same day, 7 August, 1987, the Kilkivan Shire Council formally requested the cooperation of the Nanango Shire Council in the running of the mill, and suggested that a committee of management be set up for the operation of the mill as a museum.[3]

On 10 August Sunstate Resources Ltd, based at Sherwood, wrote to the Kilkivan Shire Council confirming their acceptance of the council's offer for the mill, the letter was signed by W.F. Cox, the company secretary.[4]

The contract transferring ownership from Carricks to Kilkivan Shire Council was also dated 10 August and the Kilkivan Shire Council took possession of the mill and its ancillary buildings from that date. The total area of the land was 23.873 acres under special lease number 26389 with a title reference of S.L. 26389.[5]

The Nanango Shire Council confirmed their wish to enter into an agreement with the Kilkivan Shire Council in September 1987, subject to approval from the minister for local government. Bryan Ottone, then shire clerk of the Nanango Shire Council, advised Ray Currie of the Kilkivan Shire Council that the



Bush architecture. The toilets at Elgin Vale. Photographed December 1995.
Source—Author's collection

Nanango delegates on the joint committee of management would be Councillor R.B. McCallum and Councillor R. Yates.[6]

The Kilkivan Shire Council moved quickly to clean up the site, to effect repairs to the two houses they wished to retain, and to sell off all the other dwellings and equipment they had purchased as a part of the deal with Sunstate Resources. There were several buildings, including 2 six-roomed dwellings, 3 five-roomed dwellings and a large store room. Other items included an old bullock wagon turntable that had previously been dragged from the bed of Moonda Waamba Creek, Crown stoves, enamel baths, wash tubs, rainwater tanks, roofing iron, railway iron and steel trusses. All these items were disposed of during a clearing sale held on 3 October, 1987, and conducted by Elders Pastoral of Kingaroy. The net proceeds of which returned to the council a sum of $4203.25.[7]

Shortly afterwards the Kilkivan Shire Council notified the residents of one of the remaining houses at the mill site, Mr and Mrs R. Young, that a caretaker had been appointed to look after the mill and grounds and that their house was required as a caretaker's residence. The Young family were then given notice to vacate the building by Friday 23 October, 1987.[8]

The caretaker appointed to that position was Mr J.S. Lowe of Rodney Street, Silkstone. Mr Lowe was advised by the Nanango Shire Council on 26 October that his position as caretaker had been confirmed and that he could take up residence at the mill house on 3 November that year. Conditions of his appointment included the use of the house rent free but there were no other fees offered for the position.[9]

The management committee met at the mill on Monday 7 December, 1987, and after some discussion made several recommendations concerning the management of the mill/museum. It was recommended at that meeting that $4 per head be charged to tourist buses and that safety fences be constructed to prevent accidents to visiting tourists. Other items such as old belts and various pieces of antiquated equipment should also be sold.[10]

Approval of the joint venture between Kilkivan and Nanango Shire Councils was given on 11 December, 1987. Conditions of the approval were that the Nanango council pay the Kilkivan council fifty per cent of the net purchase price of the mill and surrounds and that the councils would equally share in the costs of running the mill as a museum.[11]

Application to have the mill listed with the National Trust was made by the Kilkivan Shire Council on 14 April, 1988. The application was registered with the National Trust on 19 April that year. Application was also made to the Australian Heritage Commission to have the mill listed on the Register of National Estates on 19 April, 1988.[12] Application had also been made to have the special lease agreement with the Lands Department altered so that the land could be gazetted as a reserve for local government.[13]

In November 1988 delegates from both councils again visited the site and Nanango Shire Council chairman, Alderman (now Councillor) Reg. McCallum, said that restoration work on the site would commence: ' ... in the very near future.' Alderman McCallum said: 'Our two shire councils are very keen to retain the historical significance of this steam mill and to ensure it becomes an important tourist attraction when opened in the new year.'[14]

By February the following year arrangements had been made to purchase a boiler from the Kingaroy Base Hospital. The agreed price for this boiler was $6000, including all the ancillary working parts, the chimney and water pump.[15]

The reserve was gazetted in April 1989 as a reserve for local government, museum purposes, and the council made application to the Queensland Forest Service to have a low level concrete causeway constructed over Moonda Waamba Creek to the site. This involved the resumption of some narrow strips of land belonging respectively to Douglas Porter of 'Telopea', and Alben Perrett of 'Elgin Vale' station.[16]

Interestingly, the same type of application had been made to the Kilkivan

Shire Council more than half a century previously. According to council minutes, in September 1931, Alben Perrett junior and several other people, presumably residents of Elgin Vale, made an application to council to have a concrete crossing constructed over the creek at Elgin Vale.[17] The request was refused at the next council meeting, the minutes of that meeting revealing that: ' ... the Council cannot see its way clear at present to accede to their request.'[18]

A 'Back to Elgin Vale' reunion was held at the mill site on Easter Saturday 30 March, 1991. The festivities were aimed at bringing together past school pupils, mill workers, forestry personnel and former residents. Visitors camped on site and were entertained by a bush band. The mill was again set in operation and its functions demonstrated to the many visitors who came for the celebrations.[19]

By April 1993 the Nanango Shire Council was having doubts concerning its continued participation in the project, and on 21 April that year the shire clerk, R.A. Hollands, wrote to the Kilkivan Shire Council advising that as his council no longer wished to participate, it was suggested that formal discussions take place to agree on some form of financial arrangement whereby the Kilkivan Shire Council purchase the Nanango council's share.[20]

In May 1994 a second caretaker, Leon Franz, was appointed to look after the mill, the first caretaker having previously resigned. Mr Franz's appointment was confirmed by letter from Ray Currie, chief executive officer of the Kilkivan Shire Council, on the 27th of that month.[21]

Chapter Eleven

T.H. Spencer—the Enigmatic Pioneer

T.H. Spencer.

Source—Mrs Valmai Fowler

Thomas Herbert Spencer was an enigmatic man, an entrepreneur with a flair for making money under sometimes difficult circumstances. He was born on 13 June, 1884, at Bundaberg and was the third of eleven children born to John Williamson and Harriett Maria Spencer (nee Brown) who lived at Avondale north of Bundaberg.[1] Spencer's father, John, was a coach builder.[2] He died at Goomeri on Monday 7 August, 1933, and an obituary published in the *South Burnett Times* shortly afterwards stated: 'The grim reaper has again taken full toll of one of Goomeri's most respected citizens in the person of Mr J.W. Spencer, father of our esteemed townsman, Mr T.H. Spencer. The deceased gentleman had reached the advanced age of 76 years and until his

illness, which only took place on Monday night, had enjoyed very good health. His genial personality had endeared himself to a host of friends in and around Goomeri. He was born at Maryborough, and on his father being killed by the blacks between Booubyjan and Maryborough his mother took him to Sydney. For a number of years he lived in the Gladstone district and later on entered into partnership with Jim Mills in a blacksmith and wheelwright business at North Bundaberg. For about 40 years prior to coming to Goomeri he resided in the Avondale district ... His remains were interred in the Goomeri cemetery.'[3]

It seems clear from the research conducted for this history that T.H. Spencer was a courageous and enterprising businessman who harboured a powerful vision for the future wealth of the region. That wealth was, he foresaw, to be derived from the enormous natural timber resources so prevalent in the area. His confidence in this vision is reflected in the fact that he was prepared to purchase a massive ten million superficial feet of timber and then erect a mill, at a cost of twelve thousand pounds—a considerable sum of money in those days—to process those logs into sawn timber. Yet, as we have seen, the move from Sefton to Elgin Vale was something of a disaster for Spencer—at least in the early days of the mill's establishment. Spencer's operations at Sefton must have been reasonably profitable, he certainly had sufficient capital at that time to close the Sefton mill and to transport all the equipment from Sefton to Elgin Vale, a not inconsiderable achievement and one that would certainly have cost a reasonable amount of money. Yet his operations at Elgin Vale were to be short lived, at least in their initial stages, and although Spencer certainly put a large amount of logs through his mill, within a few months it had closed, Spencer had moved his business office to Goomeri and was handling log traffic for other mills, primarily at Maryborough. With such a rich and diversified forestry resource at his nearby disposal, it must have been a particularly galling experience.

Did Spencer misread the trend in the timber industry, or was he banking on continued high sales despite the problems associated with the state government's excessively high royalty system? Did Spencer believe that tariffs on imported logs would solve the industry's problems, and was he convinced that added regions of forest reserves would be opened up to logging? These are questions for which, today, we have no answers. Yet the facts speak for themselves. The mill was moved from Sefton, trade dwindled due to the factors mentioned in this history, and the operation was eventually closed down for the duration of the depression. Yet ultimately the move, over the years that followed, must have been a successful one. Spencer owned the mill at Elgin Vale from 1926, the date he began its construction, to sometime late in 1927 when Wilson Hart purchased it, and with the exception of the years it lay idle, it was evidently

Log cutting, Elgin Vale.

Source—Jack Brown

providing the company with sufficient returns to keep it in operation and to provide a significant number of men with employment.

Additionally, as we have seen, Spencer was something of a political animal, and, evidently, a successful one. His terms of office as firstly councillor and later chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council are evidence of this. He served on the council from May 1927 to May 1930, from May 1936 to May 1943, from

May 1945 to May 1946 and from June 1949 to June 1958. He was first elected as chairman in May 1936, serving to 1943 and again in June 1949, serving to 1958.

During these terms Spencer was instrumental in introducing many beneficial modifications into the shire's operations, including the introduction of mechanical graders on the roads. He even went so far as to spend his own money on road improvements in the Elgin Vale district, evidence enough of the success of his milling operations there.

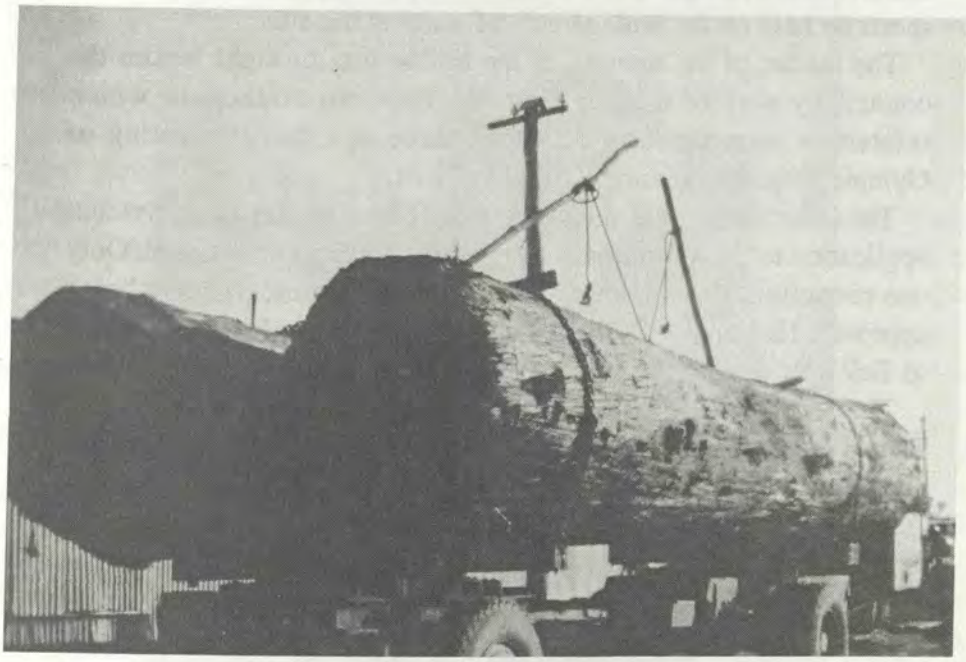
Spencer was undoubtedly something of a catalyst to the Elgin Vale region, his enterprise and determination were responsible for the small village that sprang up there, and the prosperity of the people who lived and worked within that community. In this respect he can certainly be described, in that rather quaint old-fashioned way, as the 'Father of Elgin Vale'.

Spencer's contribution to public life was formally acknowledged by the Kilkivan Shire Council in August 1958 when the council wrote to Spencer informing him that he was to be honoured by a bridge being named after him. On 12 August, 1958, the shire clerk wrote: 'Dear Sir, I have to advise that the council is desirous of making public recognition of your long period of service in the interests of the community, particularly in the sphere of local government, and has now received the concurrence of the Main Roads Commissioner for the naming of the bridge over Chippendale Creek on the Kilkivan-Goomeri Road in your honour.

'The Council sincerely hopes that this proposal is acceptable to you.'[4]

Spencer responded to this letter on 25 August, thanking the council for the honour and agreeing to having the bridge named after him.[5]

Yet the honour of this event was tainted by several controversial problems. Initially it had been decided to name a somewhat more important bridge, Bell's Bridge over the Mary River near Gympie, after Spencer. Spencer himself had been involved in the construction of this important bridge that linked Gympie to the South Burnett. By 1954 the old Bell's Bridge, constructed during the colony's formative years, was badly in need of extensive repair and was being described as a 'death trap'. Spencer, as chairman of the South Burnett Local Government Association, wrote to the main roads commissioner requesting that a new high level bridge be constructed.[6] Representations from the association and from both the Widgee and Kilkivan local government authorities were evidently successful and in August that year the *Gympie Times* published an announcement made by the transport minister, Mr J. Duggan, that a new bridge would be constructed, this would be twenty-five feet upstream from the old bridge and would be twenty-five feet higher. There were problems with financing the project with only a small amount of money available, but the



Two very large pine logs from Elgin Vale scrub 1939.
F. Coleman, Leyland truck.

Source—Irene Coleman

government appeared to be confident that the full amount of necessary funding would eventually be found.[7] The construction of the bridge took place during the following four years, and on 28 March, 1958, the Widgee Shire Council decided to honour Spencer by naming the bridge after him. Yet there were problems associated with this decision. A press report stated:

> Widgee Shire Council at its last meeting on Friday, March 28, agreed to a suggestion that the new bridge over the Mary River, near Gympie, which has been built to replace the old Bell's Bridge, will be called the T.H. Spencer Bridge, after the chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council, Cr T.H. Spencer.
>
> The bridge is to be so named in view of Cr Spencer's retirement after a long period of Local Government service.
>
> Official opening of the new bridge is scheduled to take place on Saturday, May 24, by the Main Roads Minister, Mr Evans, and the cutting of the ribbon is to be delegated to Cr Spencer.
>
> Widgee chairman (Cr W.H. Kidd) told the meeting the opening

could be made a big day and said it had been suggested that aquatic sports be held on the wide stretch of water at the site.

The matter of the naming of the bridge was brought before the council by way of a letter from the Kilkivan council in which references were made to decisions made at a recent meeting of Gympie City, Widgee and Kilkivan Shires.

The letter stated that the name would be a matter of individual application to the Main Roads by the three councils concerned. Only one councillor, Cr A. Portas, voted against the name Spencer being approved. He said the district residents would always know the bridge as Bell's Bridge.

The Mayor of Gympie, Ald. Witham, said on Monday night that he had received protests against the proposal to change the name of the bridge.

He said: 'I have received several protests from people living in the bridge area who claim that the old name of Bell's Bridge should be retained because the bridge is part of the locality.'

The Mayor said the proposal to re-name the bridge was a gesture to Cr Spencer but that the Main Roads would actually have the final say in the naming.

He added that he had notified the protests to the Kilkivan Shire Council.[8]

Spencer quickly realised that the naming of the bridge in his honour would be a detrimental move and that same month, following a meeting he had held with the mayor of Gympie, Alderman R.N. Witham, and the Widgee Council chairman, Councillor W.H. Kidd, he advised the Kilkivan Shire Council that while he 'deeply appreciated' the offer, he had decided to decline it as the changing of the name would cause confusion.[9]

Spencer was a polemical figure who attracted contingents of both supporters and detractors. During the research for this history many people who knew him have remarked that he was not trustworthy, and that he frequently attempted to defraud those contracted to him. These claims are all without evidence and should be treated merely as hearsay, but the overwhelming circumstantial evidence lends support to the theory that Spencer was a hard businessman who would do almost anything to maintain a high level of profitability. Those who remember Spencer have mixed feelings for him and are generally willing to express those feelings, good and bad. Jack Brown who knew Spencer well claims: '(He was) a terrific old bloke ... in 1923 he had the mill at Sefton, how

T.H. Spencer and his daughter Valmai.

Source—Mrs Valmai Fowler

I know that is I just threw the books away, not so long ago, I had some of his books ... I know he had a lot of money in the top drawer (of his desk) the day I saw it. I don't think he died that wealthy, but ... old Tom went for a lot of trips overseas and he spent a lot of money too. There were times when he had a lot of money ... You couldn't buy a job, and if you went to Tom Spencer, Tom would give you a job but you had to work for *his* wage. He was well respected as far as the council went too, he was chairman of the shire here for many years and he only had one enemy here, Percy Perrett ... They were at loggerheads

for many years and probably started when they were in the council together because they would never back one another ... they couldn't agree on anything ... I know they hated one another.'[10]

The businesses carried on by T.H. Spencer after he had disposed of the mill to Wilson Hart in 1927 were many and varied, although few records remain. There are several requests recorded in the minutes of the Kilkivan Shire Council revealing that Spencer was concerned over the state of certain roads, particularly those that led to or came from Elgin Vale. We know from these records that Spencer continued to request the council to upgrade the roads, and in some instances offered to pay for road repairs himself. He was also not hesitant about pointing out that he had done much to keep the roads in good repair and to request that the council provide him with certain materials free of charge. Generally, he found a sympathetic ear in the council and these requests were granted.

Spencer's dairy at Elgin Vale was one of his larger businesses that, as we have seen, supplied employment for a number of families. Spencer's daughter, Mrs Valmai Fowler, recalls:

> Possibly about the same time as he sold the mill my father bought a property at Langley Vale in the same area and set up a large herd of Jersey cows. He was very proud of this herd, his ten-unit milking machines and the quality of the cream which was almost invariably graded 'choice' and went for export butter, and if any failed to meet the standard he was very quick to investigate why. I think he was somewhat short of patience with inefficiency at work. He employed a manager with a large family, most of whom helped to run the farm, and he told me one day—it must have been during the war when manpower was scarce—this manager came to him and demanded 'half shares' as was the policy on some farms at the time, or he would quit. My father refused, sold up all the cows and installed beef cattle instead ... [11]

Spencer sold his farm at Elgin Vale to a man named Walter High Atthow, the youngest son of George and Annie Atthow who were early settlers of the Kilcoy region. Atthow was a grazier who formerly had owned 'Kingham', a grazing property that adjoined the famous Yabba station. He sold 'Kingham' in 1951 to purchase Spencer's property, 'Langley'. 'Langley' was then run as a grazing station for many years. Atthow's wife's name was Daisy, they had one son, named Ian, who became involved in the safari business in Kenya and died there of fever in 1958, aged thirty-three years. Walter Atthow later sold 'Langley' and moved to Clayfield, he died on 7 July, 1971, his wife having pre-deceased him.[12]

The precise nature of Spencer's business enterprises is now almost impossible to trace. In November 1961, only a month before Spencer's death, his accountant wrote a series of articles for the *South Burnett Times* in which he stated: 'At Dadamarine Creek at the north of the district to work the pine in the scrubs known as Fawley, Mr A. Boldery erected a small sawmill which later was owned and operated by our erstwhile citizen Mr T.H. Spencer ... later this mill was sold but Mr Spencer was instrumental in 1926 in establishing a large sawmill at Elgin Vale.'[13]

However, there were, of course, many other aspects to Spencer's business enterprises. Two people who knew Spencer well were Donald and Doris Gibb-McIntosh, now of Bundaberg, who, through their son, Milton, stated: 'The first my father heard of T.H. Spencer as a young man, he was contract yard building and fencing in the Monto and Mulgildie area. His broad axe work was perfection. He worked down to Biggenden where he built a sawmill employing Alex McKenzie and Percy Walker to cut and haul timber to the mill (approximately 1921). He then bought Sefton cattle station from Jack Redmond. There he built a mill and cut the pine on the property, (he) also acquired the "Jump Up Scrub" and blocked and roped the timber to the top of the mountain and then onto the mill. From there he built the small mill ... at Elgin Vale.'[14]

It appears that Spencer did not object to employing members of his family in his business operations, and indeed was careful to ensure that he gave what help he could to all his relatives, although during the course of this research there have been comments made that he did not pay them what they were due. Muriel Hazel Davidson, who now lives at Hervey Bay, advised that her father, John Rutherford Spencer, who was T.H. Spencer's brother, helped to build the mill at Elgin Vale in 1926 and: 'possibly managed it for a while'.[15]

Esme Hunter of Point Vernon, the daughter of Frederick Norman Spencer, one of T.H. Spencer's brothers, recalls Spencer as a compelling character who did much for his extended family. Mrs Hunter writes:

> T.H. Spencer was known to us as Uncle Bert ... In 1940 we had to move from Stanthorpe to Brisbane, as Dad had to enter Rosemount Hospital and he passed away on 22nd March, 1942 at the age of 47.
>
> During those two years, we saw quite a lot of Uncle Bert, who came to visit Dad regularly—they had always been close friends. My brother Norman had just completed his schooling, and Uncle Bert was responsible in getting Norman a position in the National Bank, where he worked up to Manager until his retirement.
>
> Uncle Bert was concerned about our welfare when Dad passed away, and made sure that Mum was going to be able to manage. My

mother was a very proud person, and did not require that help. Up until his death he always kept in touch with Mum. My mother was killed at Kedron, Brisbane in 1973 crossing a main road between white lines, aged 75 years.

We always found T.H. a 'straight down the line' person. He called a 'spade a spade'. Would help people in need, but not let anyone take advantage of him. In those early days, most children left school at 11-12 years of age, worked hard and made their money the hard way. So, it is quite understandable that his success was due to his strong character and hard work. My mother did tell me that before Uncle Bert moved to Goomeri he had a hotel at Beenleigh.[16]

Spencer seems to have achieved quite cordial relationships with the local council, even before he was elected to that body, and during the years he was not serving as a councillor he remained on good terms with the council. Evidence of this may be seen in the many entries of the council minutes in which Spencer was requesting help from the council for a variety of reasons, or asking for permission to construct buildings or to undertake other business enterprises. The following incidences may be taken as a guide.

In May 1928, the year following his sale of the mill at Elgin Vale, an application made by Spencer went before the council to seek permission to construct a garage on allotments seven and eight fronting Boonara Street in Goomeri. Permission was immediately granted.[17] A similar application for permission to install four petrol pumps on the footpath at the same location was also quickly approved in August that year. At the same council meeting the council agreed to bear half the cost of concreting the footpath in front of the garage.[18]

In April 1932, Spencer requested that the council approve the construction of an ice factory on his allotment in Boonara Street, Goomeri. The council approved the scheme.[19] In 1933 Spencer requested that the council make a grader available for hire so that he could work on the roads, and once again the council was quick to agree.[20] In 1934 Spencer again approached the council, this time to ask them to erect gates and a grid on the road through his portion 52, Gallangowan. The council immediately approved the plan.[21] In October 1935 Spencer requested that the council expend a further one hundred pounds on the Scrub Paddock road, advising that if the council was willing to do this, he would subscribe fifty pounds towards extra work, making a total amount of one hundred and fifty pounds to be expended. It was then moved by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Perrett that the council agree to expend the amount of money and that Spencer be thanked for his offer.[22] In 1946 Spencer

requested to remove a shed from Elgin Vale and re-erect it as a storeroom and garage at the rear of Trudgian's Garage premises in Goomeri, and once again the council was quick to approve the request.[23]

Sometimes Spencer came into confrontation with the council but he was always to the fore in presenting his case, and doing so quite forcefully. For example, in July 1931 Spencer and another man named James Conners wrote to the council to inform the council members that the road from Elgin Vale mill turn-off to the old Elgin Vale school was in a poor state of repair and that the council should do something about it.[24] However, the council ruminated over the problem and by January the following year nothing had been done to repair the road. Spencer again wrote to the council protesting the matter, and at the January council meeting it was moved and seconded that the repairs would be: ' ... the first works to be carried out when the (road) gangs are formed this year.'[25] However, once again the council procrastinated and made vague promises, by March that year the work had still not been carried out and Spencer again went to the council to: ' ... remind them of their promises.' He was informed that he would have to wait a further six weeks until gangs could be released from other tasks.[26]

According to T.H. Spencer's daughter, Mrs Valmai Fowler, her father was always willing to aid people in need of help and he was a strong supporter of local community events. Mrs Fowler wrote in January 1996:

> My father's office was on the main street of Goomeri and he told me it was always open for anyone to come in and discuss any problems, and he always did whatever he could to advise or help them. He cared greatly about Goomeri and worked tirelessly for it, being particularly responsible, I believe, for bringing the main road through there when it was first planned. He was a strong supporter of local activities and I particularly remember seeing pocket watches which he gave for school prizes (he was chairman of the School Council); and cups for sports events such as tennis tournaments, for which purpose he always kept a spare one in the house ready to give at short notice; also a canteen of cutlery to raffle for the foundation funds of the Goomeri Hospital. He frequently took this with him in the car as he travelled about on his own or Council business, selling tickets wherever he went. On his frequent trips to Brisbane the spare seats in his car were always freely available to anyone who wanted to go, and he sometimes even had a waiting list of women who wanted a chance to do some shopping there.[27]

The relationship between Spencer and Councillor Percival Marmaduke Perrett (not to be confused with his stepbrother Seally A. Perrett who also served on

the Kilkivan Shire Council), has been a subject for much conjecture since those years. Jack Brown of Goomeri recalls that at one time Thomas Spencer and Percy Perrett came to blows at the garage Spencer owned at Goomeri. There is no doubt that the two men were bitter enemies, they had quarrelled over a number of relatively minor issues but the main cause of their enmity appears to have been caused through remarks Perrett had made during an election campaign for local council. Spencer took offence to the remarks and charged Perrett with defamation, a charge that went through a long legal process.

Charges were laid in 1952. Thomas Herbert Spencer was the plaintiff, Percival Marmaduke Perrett was the defendant, the charge number was 1370. However, the case was not finalised until 1956 when it was brought up at the Supreme Court, Brisbane before Justices Matthews and Stanley. In his statement made at the time of the complaint, Spencer had claimed: 'Councillor Perrett has for years never let up in making statements and remarks against me so I think it is time he was taught to discontinue these tactics and I strongly take exception to the printed matter which he has distributed to various electors after I have corrected him of accusing me of certain remarks and actions. I strongly take exception to his having this printed matter distributed among the electors of the District, it has done a lot of harm to me privately as a number of people feel that I cannot be trusted.'[28]

The issue is a confusing one and the enmity between the two men remains legendary—even now, almost fifty years after the events. Both men were strong personalities and would rarely back away from confrontation. Percy Perrett was reputed never to have walked away from a fight and this reputation is substantiated by information gleaned from his own memoirs, written many years later, and concerning his experiences during the First World War. At that time Mr Perrett was forced into a situation where he was confronted by a Queensland boxing champion, and even then he did not back down.

Percy Perrett's daughter, Mrs Ailsa Stanton, recalls the events that led up to the court case with Spencer. In a letter to the author written in March, 1996, she wrote:

> My father Percy Perrett, had a stepbrother Seally Perrett ... Percy was an extremely determined man, who if he believed he was right, never backed off or ran from a fight. He was always supportive of his fellow man, black or white, if he believed he could be trusted ... He walked a very straight line, was generous, caring and extremely loyal. Percy was nobody's stooge.
>
> Seally Perrett had been a councillor for some time when at an election both Seally and Percy were voted in as councillors. At his first meeting Percy Perrett was congratulated by T.H. Spencer (chairman) and welcomed. Within 24 hours Percy was warned to toe

> the line and play the game the chairman's way or suffer the consequences. This threat to Percy was a challenge which he took up with all the strength it needed. T.H. Spencer did everything he could to bring Percy to heel, but only caused this man to dig in deeper.
>
> I believe here I should explain things as we saw them. T.H. Spencer was a financially comfortable, influential man. He employed many people from whom he demanded total loyalty. He helped people financially and in other ways. Once under thumb they became totally subservient ... T.H. Spencer's intimidation of less fortunate people only helped stir an anger in Percy and others like him, who, because of strength and circumstances, were able to stand their ground ...
>
> During one election campaign Dad had a sign on his truck, (full length of the body of the truck) carrying the slogan: 'For progress and honesty, vote Rogash.' (Jack Rogash, a friend of Percy Perrett, was then contesting the chairmanship of the Kilkivan Shire Council). This really riled T.H. Spencer, however he went on to win the election.

According to Ailsa Stanton, in 1948 Spencer received a warning from the council regarding the illegal parking of his car on the footpath in front of his garage in Boonara Street. Spencer reportedly decided to ignore the warning and a few days later, while passing the garage, Percy Perrett remarked loudly to a fellow councillor that the council's directions were being ignored. Spencer appeared from the garage, an argument ensued, and the two men exchanged blows, Spencer's glasses being broken and Perrett receiving a bloodied ear.

Approximately two years after his court case against Perrett, Spencer announced that he was retiring, and that he would not be seeking re-election to the Kilkivan Shire Council the following April. In February 1958 Spencer, as chairman of the council, told his fellow councillors that he was retiring for health reasons and that he would be supporting Mr N.E. Warburton as his replacement on the council. Warburton was Spencer's political opponent of long standing, he had been on the council for six years representing Division One and had been beaten to the Chair by Spencer who had obtained a narrow margin of 56 votes. Warburton was well known and respected in the region, deputy chairman for three years and vice president of the show society, chairman of directors of the South Burnett Cooperative Meat Works Association and secretary of the Kilkivan/Goomeri branch of the United Graziers' Association—a position he had then held for fourteen years.[29]

At this time Spencer was not well and it was evident to many of his associates that he could continue with his duties for only a limited period. In February 1958, just days after the announcement of his retirement, the press reported:

'Chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council, Cr T.H. Spencer, who last week announced his retirement in April from local authority affairs, was ill at his Goomeri home this week. Cr Spencer attended the South Burnett Local Authorities Association quarterly meeting at Nanango last Friday and was forced to leave the meeting room in a sick condition. He has been under the care of a doctor all this week.'[30]

Spencer officially retired from the Kilkivan Shire Council during its last meeting for that term in April 1958, the press reporting:

> In his farewell speech to the Kilkivan Shire Council at the council's last meeting of the present three-year term on Tuesday, April 1, the retiring chairman (Cr T.H. Spencer) said there was a beginning and an end to everything and while the council had come to the end of its term he had come to the end of his career as a councillor and council chairman.
>
> Cr Spencer, one of the outstanding figures in Local Government in Queensland, retires from council life this month after a long and success-studded public life.
>
> Our Kilkivan correspondent, Belle McKell, has sent in the following account of what took place during the dying stages of the meeting when Cr Spencer made his address and sentiments were expressed by the various council members.
>
> The chairman, Cr Spencer said: 'There is a beginning and an end of everything and we have come to the end of my term as your Chairman, I must thank you gentlemen on behalf of the rate-payers for the keen attention you have always given and for doing your best in the interest of the rate-payers, and I wish you the best for the future. Some of you will be back in office and others will not. I would like to thank the shire clerk for his untiring efforts to please us all. He has never lost his patience and has done a mighty job. I feel very proud of him as I was responsible for getting him into the shire.'
>
> He thanked the Engineer for his efforts, as he had worked in with everyone, the staff for their best of help always, and the workmen of the shire.
>
> 'The workmen in Kilkivan shire are equal to workmen in any shire in Queensland,' he said.
>
> He then thanked Mrs McKell for her fair and honest reports of the council meetings, which were greatly appreciated by all.
>
> He specially tendered thanks to Mr J.A. Heading, Minister for Works and Local Government, who, he said, had been most concerned with the shire's welfare. He said that at the recent garden party he and his wife had attended at Government House in honour of the

Governor, his wife and daughter, and at a Government House party held next morning for Chairmen of Shires, the Governor had been very impressed with Mr Heading.

The chairman concluded by again wishing the councillors, the staff and workmen the best of everything for the future and thanked them sincerely.

Cr Fitzgerald said that three years ago six of the present councillors came as new councillors. He, as one of them, looked to the chairman for a great deal of advice and assistance and he could assure everyone that he was given very sound advice. The chairman must feel gratified by the vast changes he had seen during his long term of service to the council, as a lot of progress had been due to his untiring efforts and ability ... [31]

In another report published the previous month further details of Spencer's career were revealed:

Chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council (Cr T.H. Spencer) who retires from the sphere of local authority politics in April, has built up a proud record of achievement for the South Burnett, and the Kilkivan and Goomeri districts in particular, since he came here from Sefton some 32 years ago.

Cr Spencer's success story—and a success story it is—could accurately and truthfully be referred to as a Kilkivan and Goomeri success story as his achievements in the fields of business and public life have, on nearly all occasions, been closely allied with the general progress and prosperity of the district as a whole.

This week, with his retirement drawing near, the '*S.B. Times*' interviewed Cr Spencer and after some persuasion obtained a story, that from its truth-is-stranger-than-fiction angle rivals any book as a medium of interest.

The story begins in 1926, when as a man of 41, Thomas Herbert Spencer acquired a large quantity of standing pine timber at Elgin Vale from the Forestry Department and disposed of his sawmilling interests at Sefton.

A condition of the sale was that he had to erect an up-to-date sawmill at Elgin Vale and this he proceeded to do, removing his Sefton mill to Elgin Vale, from a point between Gayndah and Goomeri.

At this new mill he found it necessary to build a small township, which included houses for married men and barracks for single men as well as a boarding house, where he had to employ a staff to provide meals for the men.

To make the married more contented he then erected a provisional school, the Education Department providing the teacher. This school was used for many years until the Department erected a new one. In the intervening years the Elgin Vale School has provided education facilities for the families of the mill and of the immediate vicinity.

In those days all snigging and hauling of the pine timber in and out of the scrub and to the mills had to be done by means of horse and bullock teams and he found it necessary to provide a grazing paddock for his working stock. This he achieved by purchasing some 2000 acres from Messrs Glasgow and Mayne.

He later replaced the stock with motor trucks and in 1927 purchased the first 'D.H.' tractor ever brought to Australia.

After placing everything in working order at the mill he disposed of the sawmilling plant to Messrs Wilson and Hart Co. of Maryborough and contracted with that firm to handle the logging in the scrub as well as the hauling of the logs to the mill and, after milling these logs, to convey the sawn timber to Goomeri and load them on to railway trucks at that town.

He said that when beginning operations at Elgin Vale there were practically no roads in the area and he was compelled to construct and upkeep many miles of roads and secure the right of way through several properties from Elgin Vale to Goomeri, for which he paid annual rentals.

Besides paying a rental for these roads he had to meet the expense of their upkeep but allowed all medium and light traffic to use them free of charge. This arrangement continued up to two years ago when the Lands Department took over the roads and paid Cr Spencer what he termed 'satisfactory compensation'.

One road in particular, which was his private road, has now been handed over to the Kilkivan Shire Council and in the past, as now, has been a big factor in opening up the district.

Cr Spencer's career as a councillor began some 31 years ago, when being unsuccessful in inducing the council to repair roads which he was subsidising, he decided to offer himself as a candidate for No 3. Division, defeating the late Mr I. Moore, of Barambah, who was a councillor for many years.

He has been a member of the council on and off ever since being chairman for 16 years, the last nine years continuously, with a previous break of seven years.

Cr Spencer mentioned that in connection with the 2000 acres he purchased for grazing his bullocks he later had 800 acres of this cleared for cultivation and had buildings, yards, bails, 300 ton silos and feed stalls for 400 milking cows erected, thus establishing an up-to-date dairy.

Owing to the shortage of labour he was compelled to sell the cows during World War II and go in for grazing and fattening of cattle.

On the property he fattened 400 head of cattle annually.

He also had a lease of a timber reserve, where he grazed and fattened a further 600 head. When he was faced with the necessity of providing water on this reserve he solved the problem in typical fashion by constructing eight very large dams, some up to 30 feet deep when filled, and covering up to 12 acres in surface area.

Later he purchased 4000 odd acres at Dadamarine Creek from Mr W.R. Boldery and set up a small modern sawmill amidst the very large quantity of standing pine timber on the property. He worked this mill for some time and later disposed of the mill and part of the land to Mr J. Ferrier and the balance of the land to Mr Sam Beresford.

At the time of acquiring the Dadamarine Creek property he also purchased a sawmill at a point about 16 miles south of Kilkivan at Collins Creek. This mill, together with large timber rights, he later sold to Messrs. Hayden Shire & Co., who still retain the mill.

Having sold all these properties he decided to relinquish his outdoor activities of his Elgin Vale holding to Mr Walter Atthow, who still resides there.

Thirty-one years ago he bought two allotments in Boonara Street, Goomeri and erected a garage building and offices there. At first he used the garage for the servicing of his vehicles and the office for his own use but later leased the buildings to tenants.

Twelve months ago he made alterations and additions to the buildings, which are among the most up-to-date in the South Burnett, combining all the facilities required by the general public and also, the installation of ladies' conveniences.

During the years he has devoted to public affairs he has been:

- Chairman of the Goomeri State School Committee for nine years.
- President of the South Burnett Sawmilling Association for some twelve years.
- For three years a member of the Gympie and Wondai Hospital Boards.

- Chairman of the old South Burnett Regional Electricity Board for a period of two years and a member of the Wide Bay Burnett Board following the amalgamation.
- Chairman of the South Burnett Local Authorities Association and a member of the association for many years.
- The first president of the Goomeri Chamber of Commerce.

About thirty years ago, being anxious to see Goomeri provided with as many amenities as possible, he invited the then Minister for Justice, the late Mr Mullins, to visit Goomeri with a view to have a court house and C.P.S. office built there.

Mr Mullins duly arrived and was taken by Cr Spencer on a tour of the district. In the course of this Mr Mullins was given an insight into the requirements of the district.

Cr Spencer then got busy and with the assistance of Mr T.M. Wise, Mr Les. Higgins and the late Mr George Bourne as well as other businessmen was instrumental in having the Goomeri Chamber of Commerce formed.

This chamber then seriously took up the matter of the court house and police station and before long were successful in having them erected.

Any movement calculated to help in the progress of the town and district always had his wholehearted support and as chairman of the shire he took a leading part in the move which was responsible for having the old town monument replaced with an up-to-date monument with a four-face clock.

Some ten years ago he gathered all the information he could regarding the construction of a bowling green in Goomeri and then supervised the actual establishment of the green. For his services to the bowling club he was appointed a life member and was patron for many years.

Cr Spencer's private life is with his wife and his son and daughter. His son, Dr H.C. Spencer, has his own private practice at Chatswood, Sydney and during the last war was a captain in the Medical Corps at Borneo and other centres.

His daughter is a past-pupil of the Sydney University and graduated as an architect. She lives in England with her husband, who is an officer in the Bank of England.

Two years ago Cr Spencer paid a visit to England and America and was privileged to see many centres of interest.

On two occasions he entertained the State Governor, the late Sir

T.H. Spencer and his wife Ethel.

Source Mrs Valmai Fowler

Leslie Wilson at Goomeri and Kilkivan and on another occasion entertained the then Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Sir John Chandler.

A big forward movement in road and bridge construction within the shire has taken place during his period as shire chairman and he has at all times performed the difficult task of treating all sections of his huge shire with impartiality and fairness.[32]

After his retirement from business and civil duties Spencer decided—perhaps realising his time was at last limited—that he and his wife would go on an extensive overseas holiday. It was an event that created some considerable interest in the region and the press headlined: 'Overseas Trip For Goomeri Couple.'[33] Spencer himself told the press that he and his wife would be flying out from Kingaroy airport in April that year, flying firstly to Brisbane and then Sydney to catch their international connection. The trip, covering Britain, Europe, the USA, Canada and several other countries would take approximately seven months. They left Sydney on 6 May, 1959, flying firstly to Melbourne and Perth. The aircraft then travelled to Djakarta, where it was refuelled and serviced, and then overnight to Singapore, Ceylon, Bombay, Karachi and Cairo where the passengers took breakfast. Leaving Cairo they were taken to Rome and finally London where Spencer and his wife Ethel were met by their daughter, Valmai, and her husband. For the following months they pursued a busy schedule. Shortly after their arrival they attended the Royal Agricultural Show where they were presented to Princess Margaret, Spencer later writing: 'My wife and I were among those who were presented to the Princess, whom we found to be a very charming lady. It was typical of her that she made enquiries after her cousin in Australia, Lady Mary Abel Smith, wife of the Queensland Governor.'[34] The couple then travelled extensively through Europe, visiting Calais, Brussels, Aachen, Bonn, Bingen and Nuremberg where they were conducted around one of the former Nazi concentration camps. Spencer wrote: 'It gives one a very depressed and unhappy feeling and brought tears to the eyes of many of the party. All in all it took most of us a few days to recover from the terrible things explained and shown us at Nuremberg.'[35] Following this experience Spencer and his wife were taken to Munich. The city was still showing signs of war damage, bombed houses and other buildings that had neither been pulled down nor rebuilt. They travelled throughout Austria, through the famous Brenner Pass, linking Austria and Italy, and on to Venice. They purchased some exquisite Viennese glassware as gifts for their daughter in England and their daughter-in-law in Sydney, and then went on to Florence and Rome where they toured the Vatican City. Later they travelled to Sorrento and the ancient ruins of Pompeii. Over the following weeks they travelled to Naples, Pisa, Genoa, Monte Carlo and finally returned to Switzerland, France and London.[36]

In September Spencer and his wife flew to New York and went on to Montreal, Toronto and Chicago where they remained for several days. They then travelled to Winnipeg and Vancouver.[37] Over the following weeks the couple travelled extensively throughout the United States, staying, at the end of their trip at the famous Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York where General Douglas MacArthur

T.H. Spencer and his wife Ethel being officially welcomed aboard *H.M.S. King George V*, for their daughter's wedding reception, 1945.
Source Mrs Valmai Fowler

retained a suite of rooms on the upper floor. The Spencers finally returned to Sydney via Honolulu. While they were in the vicinity a volcanic eruption took place on Hawaii. Spencer later wrote of this event: 'On the Saturday night ... we were in Honolulu at 8.30 p.m. a volcanic eruption took place on an adjoining island (Hawaii) and erupted up to 1000 feet. Molten lava was seen running down the huge ravine of the volcano. The aeroplane company broadcasted they would take people out that night to view the eruption at a fee of $45 each. Among others I went out at 10 p.m. and viewed the eruption. The trip took two and a half hours and the plane circled around eight times to give the passengers a good opportunity to view the eruption. The lava was flying all around the plane and the following night two planes were hit by lava and windscreens broken.' Following this excitement the Spencers returned to Sydney via Fiji where they were met by their son, Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer. During the seven months Spencer had been away he collected more than two thousand postcards, slides and brochures that he later showed to various local organisations for benefit purposes.[38]

Spencer was to live for only three years following his retirement and, despite the holidays he had enjoyed, they were years during which he experienced several illnesses. Indeed, even before his retirement illness had struck, during the opening ceremonies of the Goomeri memorial hospital in 1951, Spencer was absent, a press report claiming: 'Cr Warburton, Deputy Chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council, apologised for the absence of the Shire Chairman (Cr T.H. Spencer) who was ill, and he hoped that he would have a speedy recovery.'[39] On the same date the press also published: 'Residents of the South Burnett will regret to learn of the illness of Cr T.H. Spencer, Chairman of the Kilkivan Shire Council and a member of the Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Electricity Board. Cr Spencer's illness was most unexpected and residents of the South Burnett join in wishing him a speedy recovery. It is understood that Cr Spencer has been advised to take things easy for the next three months.'[40]

According to his son, Doctor H.C. Spencer, T.H. Spencer underwent surgery for a prostate problem and later suffered from Alzheimer's Disease. He was in the process of converting a house into flats at Hervey Bay when disaster struck. His son recalls: ' ... he was interested in building, or converting a house into units in Urangan ... It was 6 units and it was just barely completed when he died. First of all he did have, I suppose, two strokes, one was in Brisbane on some business ... but he usually got somebody to come along to drive his car to ... pick him up and bring him home back to Goomeri. On this occasion he didn't do it, he got into a sort of a bus arrangement, it used to run almost daily I think from Brisbane to Goomeri and it got in at night time. When he tried to get out of the bus, he couldn't. He then discovered that he was paralysed actually in one leg and that's when he went into a little hospital up there, a cottage hospital I suppose you'd call it.'[41]

Former electrical contractor, Trevor Nielsen of Hervey Bay confirms that Spencer's last project in life was the construction of his flats at Hervey Bay. However, when Spencer died it left the builder, Reg Smith, and his contractors, in something of a quandary. The flats were almost finished and payments were due to be made, yet the estate took time to wind up and with a daughter living in England there were considerable delays in obtaining signatures etc. Mr Neilsen recalls: 'I knew a solicitor in Gympie by the name of Jack Cartwright, he was a friend of mine, we've been friends since we were teenagers ... Well Jack at that time got my money for me in dribs and drabs, it was quite a bit of money at that time, about a thousand pounds that was owing to me.'[42]

Spencer died at the Goomeri memorial hospital on 4 December, 1961 and was cremated at Mount Thompson crematorium in Brisbane. He was seventy-seven years of age at the time of his death. According to his death certificate the cause of his death was: '1. (a) cerebral haemorrhage, (b) arteriosclerosis. 2. Senility.' His attending surgeon was Doctor K.H. Pike who saw Spencer just two days before his death and subsequently signed the death certificate.[43]

Spencer was survived by his son, Herbert Cyril (Larry) and daughter, Valmai. Valmai had married a British naval officer, Lieutenant Commander J.O. Fowler, R.N.R. at St Andrew's Cathedral in Sydney in 1945. Valmai had previously graduated in architecture, she went with her husband to England in 1945 and has lived there ever since. Lieutenant-Commander Fowler had served aboard the naval vessel *H.M.S. King George V* and when the ship was subsequently laid up he was given one of the ship's bells—a considerable naval honour. The bell is still in use, and the house in which Mr and Mrs Fowler now live in England was designed by Mrs Fowler who also designed a special recess for the bell. It is used as a call signal for anyone out of earshot. Mr Fowler, who retired as a commander, R.D., R.N.R., later served as a principal with the Bank of England.[44]

Shortly after T.H. Spencer's death the *South Burnett Times* published a brief obituary which stated:

> A man who was a member of the Kilkivan Shire Council ... died in the Goomeri Private Hospital early last Monday night.
>
> He was Mr Thomas Herbert Spencer, a man who had a long and colourful association with the Goomeri district.
>
> The late Mr Spencer, who was 77, came to Goomeri in September, 1926, and was one of the leading figures in the once prosperous timber industry in that district.
>
> His other interests included farming, real estate, trucking and the management of a garage business.
>
> During his long term as a councillor he acquired a deep knowledge of local government law and was reputed to have considerable standing in government departments in Brisbane.
>
> He was also at one time a member of the Wide Bay-Burnett Regional Electricity Board.
>
> He retired from the council a few years ago and was replaced as chairman by Mr N.E. Warburton, a Cinnabar grazier.
>
> Mr Warburton was supported in his campaign for the chair by Mr Spencer. The late Mr Spencer had been in indifferent health for some

time and over two weeks ago suffered a stroke from which he failed to recover.

He lived for many years with his widow in a large and well kept house in the business section of Goomeri.

He is survived by his widow and two children, Dr H.C. Spencer, Sydney and Ethel Valmai (Mrs Fowler) Surrey, England.

The deceased had been on two overseas trips in recent years.[45]

T.H. Spencer's son, Dr H.C. Spencer, still lives in Sydney. T.H. Spencer had three brothers, including Jack and Roy Spencer, Roy was an inspector of police at Toowoomba, another brother fought during the Great War and came home with tuberculosis. Spencer also had one sister, Viola.[46]

As for Elgin Vale, the changes made to the small community have been cataclysmic. When the mill closed in 1987 the village virtually died with it. Without work those who had been employed at the mill drifted away to other centres, some went milling, others, such as the last mill manager, Bob Mercer, simply retired. Over the following months and years the buildings fell into disrepair, many were either taken down and destroyed or were moved to other locations. The general community around Elgin Vale was also in the throes of change, dairy farming through the sixties, seventies and eighties was becoming subject to far stricter government regulation that saw many of the farmers change from dairying to other forms of primary production—principally beef and pork. Smaller farmers sold their lands to other farmers and so farms grew in proportion, but as this expansion took place the population naturally dwindled as larger tracts of land became the properties of smaller numbers of farmers. Today there are no dairy farms in the Elgin Vale district and the thriving little village, once the centre of so much activity, is merely a ghost town dominated by the one structure that started it all, the Elgin Vale mill, standing silent, dark, brooding and alone on the banks of Moonda Waamba Creek.

Photographic Study

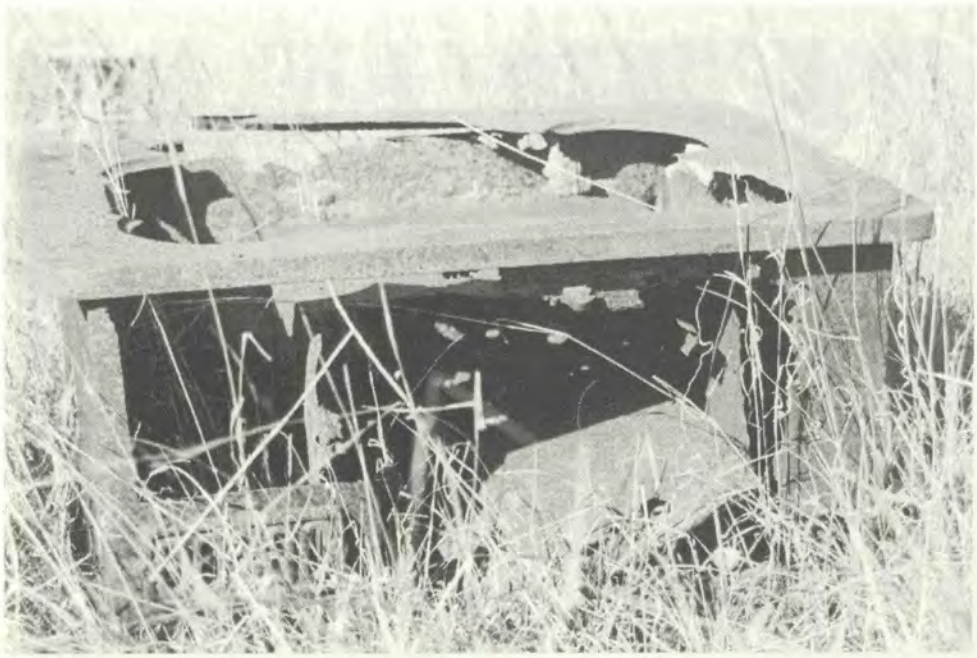
All the photographs included in this study below and on the next four pages were taken by Dr Tony Matthews at Elgin Vale on Monday 4 December and Saturday 9 December, 1995. With the exception of the last photograph these photographs are intended to depict the scene at Elgin Vale at that time, and to show the remains of buildings and other remnants of the village that once stood on the site. From these photographs readers of this history may gain an insight into the general site formation, the constructions that once stood there and what has now been left. Care has been taken not to disturb any of the archaeological evidence present on site and these photographs show the scene exactly as it was found on the dates mentioned.

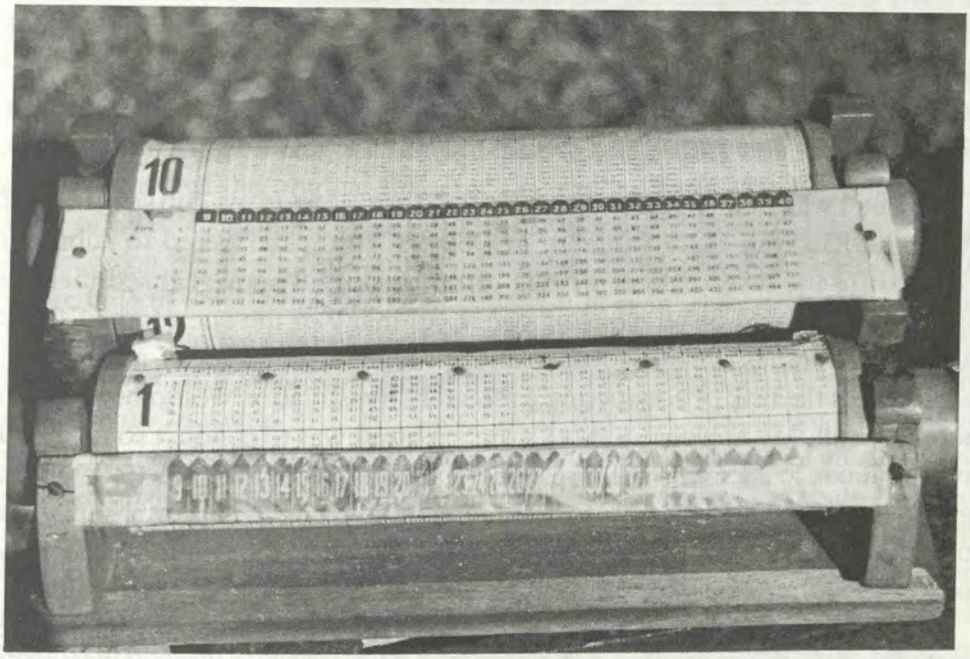
View looking down on mill.

Above: Remains of one of the houses at Elgin Vale. Note school in background.
Below: Remains of structure at Elgin Vale.

Above: Remains of fence that once fronted a worker's home at Elgin Vale.
Below: Remains of a calf pen situated on the north-eastern side of the men's barracks.

Above: The remains of steel wheels, Elgin Vale.
Below: Remains of wood stove at Elgin Vale





Timber ready-reckoner, this was donated to the Kilkivan Historical Society by former timber truck driver Jack Brown and originally belonged to T.H. Spencer. The device was used to calculate superficial feet.

Research and Methodology

When I was first approached by Mr Ray Currie, chief executive officer of the Kilkivan Shire Council, in October 1995, and asked to submit a proposal for the research and writing of this history, I soon realised that the research task would be an exacting one. Like many of the operators of those early mills, Thomas Herbert Spencer kept few records for posterity, and without such records the task of conducting a research investigation would be so much more difficult. My response to Mr Currie's request was to conduct some initial investigations to ascertain what resource materials were available. Mr Currie agreed to this and over the following month or so I began a series of correspondence and telephone calls to discover what information there may have been in the usual depositories.

Letters were sent to the State Library, the John Oxley Library, the State Archives, the Department of Primary Industries, the forestry offices of Gallangowan and Imbil, the Queensland Museum, the Woodworks Museum at Gympie, and also to a number of people with the surname of Spencer whom I located in the telephone book. These were resident at a variety of areas, including Bundaberg, Kingaroy, Clifton, Goomeri and Sydney. The letters asked if the recipients were related to Thomas Herbert Spencer in any way, and if so could the recipients be of help.

During a research field trip to visit the archives of the Maryborough, Wide Bay and Burnett Historical Society, at Maryborough, I discovered the name of Mr Harold Marshall, as we have seen, a former executive of the Wilson Hart company—the company that owned the Elgin Vale mill. During two telephone interviews I initially carried out with Mr Marshall in October 1995 and at a subsequent personal interview held at Maryborough on 11 December that year, I was informed by Mr Marshall that when the Wilson Hart operation had been closed, all documents relating to the history of the business—including those relevant to the history and operations of the mill at Elgin Vale—had been either dispersed or destroyed. This left a considerable hole in the resource materials concerning the Elgin Vale mill and as a result much of the very important detailed business history of the mill can never be told.

I made a preliminary site inspection of the mill on the morning of Thursday 5 October, 1995 and was impressed with the condition of the buildings, the machinery and saw-benches. I noted that circumstantial material on the history

of the site could be gleaned from a careful site inspection and from an investigation of the grounds and office materials remaining at the mill.

During this initial survey period of resource materials I received replies from a number of my letters. The John Oxley Library advised that they have a file of news cuttings concerning the mill but the file is painfully thin. They also hold a photograph of the original Ross and Co. mill at Elgin Vale dated 1910, but none of Spencer's mill. Forestry House in Brisbane advised that they have no holdings on the Elgin Vale mill but that they might have photographs, they invited me to conduct photographic research at their library. The Woodworks Museum at Gympie advised that they have no holdings on the mill, but they do have a copy of a very brief (three minutes) video-tape, shot by staff of the Queensland Museum in 1986. They kindly lent this tape to me for preview purposes, and while it contains little of historical significance, it does give some interesting technical details of the mill's operations. The State Archives also advised that they have no holdings on the mill, but stated that they do have a considerable number of related documents concerning the history of the timber industry in general and other related topics. These included Police Department records in relation to strikes of various industries—including sawmills, valuation registers of the Kilkivan Shire Council, general correspondence from that council and various maps. They also hold the *Commission Into the Sawmilling Industry and the Manufacture of Plywood and Joinery*—a transcript of evidence dated 1949.

It was with these somewhat mixed results that I again entered into correspondence with Mr Ray Currie of the Kilkivan Shire Council and, after outlining my preliminary findings I was subsequently commissioned to write this history.

Other resources utilised during the research stages of this document include the files of several publications such as the *Maryborough Chronicle*, the *Nanango News,* the *Gympie Times* the *South Burnett Times* and the *Nanango Advocate* (both Nanango papers are now defunct), although, unfortunately—due to a fire at the offices of the *South Burnett Times* in 1932—most of the daily information of life in the district published in those editions prior to that date was destroyed—although a few early editions are still in existence. These newspapers had not been duplicated in any way prior to their destruction and only one complete set had existed. It is reasonable to assume that many of the Elgin Vale's early operations—its opening, for example—would have been reported in these papers and thus with their destruction much of the mill's fledgling history was also destroyed.

Information, as may be seen from the transcripts of their interviews, was supplied by various members of the community who have either worked at the

mill or have been associated with its operations in one way or another. These interviews were conducted primarily during the period Monday 4 December, 1995, to 12 December, 1995. Some were recorded at the mill while others were conducted at private homes. Several of the interviewees agreed to meet me at the mill and to point out items of interest, these included Mr Graham Knight, a councillor of the Kilkivan Shire Council and former mill worker, Graeme Ryan, who also once worked at the mill, and Leon Franz, the caretaker of the mill. Other interviewees included Harold Marshall, Douglas Porter, Jack Brown, Irene Coleman, Jim and Thelma Knipe, Ruth Porter, a descendant of the pioneering Porter brothers, Lucy Collard, Madge Locke and Vic Wilson who once worked at the mill. Several telephone interviews were held with Dr Herbert Cyril Spencer, the son of T.H. Spencer, and Dr Spencer also agreed to supply one of the photographs of T.H. Spencer used in this history. Correspondence was also received from Mrs Valmai Fowler, Spencer's daughter, and this correspondence gave an insight into Spencer and his family and businesses.

Apart from the preliminary inspection, site surveys were carried out on two separate occasions. This fieldwork was conducted on Monday 4 December, 1995, and Saturday 9 December, 1995, and concentrated on all the known topographical features within the grounds of the sawmill site. There were no deliberate disturbances of the surrounding vegetation and no excavations or subterraneous electronic investigations were made at the site. Some significant features were recorded using a compass and measuring tape.

A note should here be made of the measurements of the plans reproduced for this history during these site surveys. As there is little in the way of evidence for many of the buildings that once stood at the village site, the dimensions of the buildings are calculated using various methods. The hall and barracks, for example, were calculated using existing stump measurements and taking into consideration the lengths of standard building materials in imperial measurements. Added information was derived from hand drawings supplied by two people, Graeme Ryan and Graham Knight, both of whom are fully conversant with the respective buildings. As with all other small communities, buildings were periodically constructed and subsequently taken down or altered or destroyed, and as there is no extant professional survey of the buildings that once stood at the site, the rough plan of the village buildings drawn by mill management and discovered in the mill office in December 1995 gives us the only known recorded map of village layout in relation to the mill. Even so, it is evident that this plan is also incomplete, there are no measurements shown and it is clear from compass bearings taken during the site survey for this history that the buildings indicated on the rough mill site map are generally incorrectly placed.

Records of the Kilkivan Shire Council were checked, including correspondence files, rate notices, lease agreements and documents directly relating to the mill and its transfer to shire council ownership. Further documentation was located in the files of the Kilkivan Historical Society.

Press releases concerning the project were sent to numerous regional papers and the subsequent articles appearing in print led to most of the private individuals who either wrote to me or telephoned me with information or photographs. Peter Olds of Olds Engineering, Maryborough, kindly allowed me to use his fascinating memoir, *Interlude at Elgin Vale,* written in 1996, dealing with some of the engineering aspects of the sawmill.

A research trip was made to various archives at Brisbane from Thursday 14 December, 1995, to 19 December, 1995. This revealed a quantity of information including letters written by Spencer to the Kilkivan Shire Council requesting permission to connect a phone to the mill and stating that the mill was then being constructed. This gave the year when Spencer moved his operations from Sefton to Elgin Vale. This trip resulted in much of the information included in this history. I was assisted in the field at the various archives by my wife, Lensie Matthews, who is herself a highly experienced and capable researcher with many years of practical knowledge in areas of primary source research.

Notes and Sources

Chapter One

1. *Wilderness to Wealth,* (hereinafter referred to as WW) Murphy and Easton, p 300.
2. Author interview with Ruth Porter, held at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996. See also WW, p 324.
3. WW, p 324.
4. Author interview with Ruth Porter, held at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
5. *Pittsworth Sentinel,* 31 August, 1912.
6. WW, p 325.

Chapter Two

1. Barton, C.H., *The Queensland Timber Industry,* a paper read before the Maryborough Chamber of Commerce, Robinson and Co., 1885, p 25.
2. For details of commercial values of timbers see *Maryborough Chronicle,* (hereinafter referred to as M/C) 24 March, 1902, p 2.
3. M/C. 29 May, 1869, p 2.
4. M/C. 20 November, 1901, p 3.
5. For details of costs incurred in this way see James Fairlie's comments in M/C. 24 March, 1902, p 2.
6. M/C. 7 December, 1886, p 3.
7. M/C. 21 December, 1904, p 2.
8. M/C. 22 August, 1906, p 4.
9. M/C. 1 February, 1906, p 3.
10. M/C. 23 February, 1906, p 4.
11. M/C. 19 April, 1906, p 4.
12. M/C. 12 July, 1916, p 4.
13. M/C. 23 August, 1918, p 6.
14. M/C. 29 November, 1918, p 3.
15. M/C. 4 September, 1920, p 4.
16. M/C. 31 December, 1920, p 2.
17. M/C. 20 November, 1923, p 5.
18. M/C. 2 August, 1923, p 4.
19. M/C. 12 February, 1924, p 4.
20. M/C. 4 March, 1924, p 7.
21. Author interview with Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer, 20 February, 1996.
22. Author interview with Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer, 31 December, 1995.
23. Death certificate, District Registrar's Office. Kingaroy.

24. Letter to the author from Mrs Valmai Fowler, dated 21 January, 1996.
25. M/C. 2 October, 1925, p 5 and M/C. 2 October, 1925, p 5.
26. M/C. 21 June, 1927, p 2.
27. M/C. 16 July, 1927, p 14.
28. Author interview with Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer, 20 February, 1996.
29. *South Burnett Times,* (hereinafter referred to as SBT) 8 January, 1926, p 2.
30. SBT. 21 January, 1938, p 2.
31. Ibid.
32. SBT. 26 April, 1940, p 3.

Chapter Three

1. Author interview with Douglas Porter, conducted at his home, 'Telopea', Elgin Vale, on the afternoon of Monday, 4 December, 1995.
2. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 3 March, 1926, p 4.
3. For a copy of this letter see Queensland State Archives, A/21021.
4. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 1 September, 1926, p 5.
5. Surveying and Mapping Museum, Brisbane.
6. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 6 October, 1926, p 4.
7. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 7 December, 1926, p 5.
8. SBT. 23 September, 1927, p 2.
9. SBT. 11 November, 1927, p 7.
10. M/C. 30 April, 1930, p 11.
11. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 6 June, 1917, p 3.
12. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 4 July, 1917, p 3.
13. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 3 February, 1926, p 5.
14. M/C. 27 August, 1927, p 11.
15. Author interview with Douglas Porter, conducted at his home, 'Telopea', Elgin Vale, on the afternoon of Monday, 4 December, 1995.
16. Centenary report of Wilson Hart and Co., published in 1965. The sale of the mill in 1927 is confirmed by numerous sources, including the centenary report of Wilson Hart which was compiled from original documents, an interview with former Wilson Hart general manager Harold Marshall at Maryborough, and a news report published in the *Maryborough Chronicle* on 30 April, 1930, which claimed that the mill ' ... was established about three years ago ... (and) later on it was sold to Messrs Wilson Hart and Coy., Ltd., Maryborough'.
17. M/C. 6 March, 1875.
18. M/C. 22 October, 1881.
19. M/C. 8 December, 1934, p 10.
20. M/C. 6 October, 1936, p 2 and M/C. 8 October, 1965, p 8. For further details on the history of the Wilson Hart mill at Maryborough see: Matthews, Tony, *River of Dreams, a History of Maryborough and District,* Vol 2, pp 356-360.

21. M/C. 30 April, 1930, p 7.
22. Ibid, p 8.
23. WW, p 326.
24. M/C. 8 October, 1965, supplement.
25. M/C. 16 February, 1928, p 2.
26. M/C. 28 July, 1930, p 5.
27. M/C. 30 April, 1930, p 8.
28. M/C. 23 October, 1931, p 2.
29. M/C. 23 August, 1933, p 6.
30. M/C. 28 November, 1933, p 7. See also, M/C. 21 February, 1934, p 6.
31. *The Nanango News,* (hereinafter referred to as NN.) 7 May, 1936, p 5.

Chapter Four

1. Author interview with Jim and Thelma Knipe at Goomeri, Friday 8 December, 1995.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. For a copy of this letter see: State Archives of Queensland, file A 21142.
6. Ibid.
7. Author interview with Jim and Thelma Knipe at Goomeri, Friday 8 December, 1995.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Author interview with Jack Brown at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
11. SBT. 26 October, 1961.
12. SBT. 9 November, 1961, p 19.
13. Author interview with Jack Brown at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid and author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.

Chapter Five

1. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
2. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.

3. Ibid and author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.
4. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. *Nanango Advocate,* (hereinafter referred to as NA) 31 July, 1947.
9. Ibid.
10. SBT. 8 January, 1969, p 7.
11. SBT. 8 July, 1987.
12. NN. 11 April, 1935, p 5.
13. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
14. Register of Accidents discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995.
15. Ibid.
16. SBT. 27 September, 1972, p 5.
17. Author interview with Mrs E.M. Schultz, 4 March, 1996.
18. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
19. Ibid.
20. Wilson Hart and Co. Ltd., memorandum, dated 9 June, 1975 from the general manager, Harold Marshall, enclosing listings for workers' compensation. Information has also been taken from the Register of Accidents, both documents were discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995 and currently held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
21. Author interview with Mrs E.M. Schultz, 4 March, 1996.
22. Memorandum to Occupiers of Factories from the Office of the Industrial Inspector, dated 22 October, 1962. Document discovered at the site of the original office at the Elgin Vale mill during field research on 9 December, 1995.
23. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
24. Ibid.
25. Register of Accidents discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995.
26. Memorandum discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995.
27. Memorandum from Ian McBryde, development manager of Wilson Hart, dated 2 July, 1975. Document found at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995, the original is now held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
28. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
29. Author interview with Jack Brown at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
30. SBT. 25 March, 1943, p 6.
31. NN. 16 May, 1935, p 2.
32. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.

33. Ibid.
34. Author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.
35. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995
36. Author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.
37. Ibid.
38. SBT. 31 July, 1936, p 2.
39. *Sunday Mail,* 24 December, 1939, p 1.
40. Author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.
41. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995, and site inspection, 9 December, 1995.
42. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
43. Author interview with Bob Mercer, at Nanango, 12 December, 1995.
44. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
45. M/C. 28 April, 1931, p 2.
46. Author interview with Douglas Porter, conducted at his home, 'Telopea', Elgin Vale, on the afternoon of Monday, 4 December, 1995.
47. Author interview with Jim and Thelma Knipe at Goomeri, Friday 8 December, 1995.
48. Ibid.
49. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
50. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
51. Author interview with Douglas Porter, conducted at his home, 'Telopea', Elgin Vale, on the afternoon of Monday, 4 December, 1995.
52. Minutes of the Kilkivan Shire Council, 6 November, 1925, p 5.
53. Author interview with Jim and Thelma Knipe at Goomeri, Friday 8 December, 1995.
54. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
55. Author interview with Jack Brown at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
56. NN. 6 September, 1933, p 2.
57. For details of the court case see: SBT. 1 December, 1939 p 2 and NN. 14 December, 1939, p 6.
58. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
59. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
60. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
61. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
62. Author interview with Graham Knight and Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
63. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
64. NN. 4 July, 1935, p 4.
65. NA. 4 December, 1947, p 6.
66. NA. 7 June, 1951, p 3.
67. Author interview with Madge Locke and Lucy Collard, 20 February, 1996.

Chapter Six

1. NN. 4 April, 1940, p 4.
2. M/C. 8 October, 1965.
3. M/C. 8 May, 1944, p 2.
4. *Gympie Times,* (hereinafter referred to as GT) 29 April, 1944, p 6.
5. M/C. 12 May, 1944, p 3.
6. GT. 20 May, 1944, p 6.
7. A few of these permits, some in very poor condition, dated during the 1970s may still be seen, they were recovered from the office of the mill during field research, 9 December, 1995. These documents have undergone preservation work and are currently held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
8. Author interview with Vic Wilson at Toowoomba, 2 January, 1996.
9. For details on these fires see: M/C. 10 July, 1944, p 3.
10. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 4 June, 1940, p 3.
11. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
12. NA. 28 November, 1946, p 1.
13. M/C. 8 October, 1965, supplement.
14. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
15. Ibid.
16. Author interview with Bob Mercer, at Nanango, 12 December, 1995.
17. Ibid.
18. Author interview with Jim and Thelma Knipe at Goomeri, Friday 8 December, 1995.
19. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
20. Ibid.
21. SBT. 8 July, 1987.
22. Ibid.
23. Documents discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995, currently held by the Kilkivan Shire Council.
24. Memorandum from J. McBryde to I.R. Collard, manager at Elgin Vale, dated 27 June, 1975. This document was discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research conducted on 9 December, 1995. The document is now held by the Kilkivan Shire Council.
25. Author interview with Bob Mercer, at Nanango, 12 December, 1995.
26. Ibid.

Chapter Seven

1. Author interview with Irene Coleman, at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
2. Author interview with Douglas Porter, conducted at his home, 'Telopea', Elgin Vale, on the afternoon of Monday, 4 December, 1995.
3. Ibid.

4. Author interview with Graeme Ryan, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995. For a list of teachers and assistant teachers who served at the Elgin Vale school from 1899 to 1977, see: *Goomeri State School Diamond Jubilee, 1912-1987,* pp 49-50 and, *A History of Education in the Goomeri District,* pp 51-53.
5. SBT. 3 October, 1979, p 2.

Chapter Eight

1. SBT. 14 May, 1980, p 3.
2. SBT. 8 July, 1987.
3. Author interview with Graham Knight, at Elgin Vale, 9 December, 1995.
4. Inspection of chemicals on site, 9 December, 1995.
5. Boiler water treatment document, compiled by Maxwell Water Treatment of Fairfield Road Moorooka, discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995, original now held by the Kilkivan Shire Council.
6. Log of mill's operations from 1968 to 1980, discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995, now held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
7. Daily Cutting Book, August 1974 to December 1976, discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995. This log is currently held by the Kilkivan Shire Council.
8. Certificate of Inspection number 1143141 dated 12 June, 1986, discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995, original held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
9. Correspondence series, Gerrard Strapping Systems, Wilson Hart and Co. Ltd., and Laheys, a division of Carricks, dated from 12 March, 1979 to 24 April, 1979, discovered at the Elgin Vale office during field research, 9 December, 1995, currently held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
10. Olds, Peter, *Interlude at Elgin Vale,* Maryborough, 1996.
11. Log of the daily operations of the mill, 1968 to 1979, discovered at the Elgin Vale mill office during field research, 9 December, 1995 and currently held at the Kilkivan Shire Council.
12. This letter may be found on leaf 60 of the Koala pen carbon book in the Elgin Vale documents held by the Kilkivan Shire Council, it was discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research conducted on 9 December, 1995.

Chapter Nine

1. Author interview with Harold Marshall, at Maryborough, 11 December, 1995.
2. Carricks Group, Third Annual Report to Staff, p 2, copy discovered at the office of the Elgin Vale mill during field research, 9 December, 1995, original now held at the Kilkivan Shire Council. For a breakdown of the various groups within Carricks, showing how the Wilson Hart and Elgin Vale mill operations were administratively separated, see Appendix Two.
3. Carricks' annual report to staff, p 1.
4. Ibid, p 7.
5. For a breakdown of divisions, people employed and the various regions in which Carricks held interests, see Appendix Two.
6. Author interview with Harold Marshall, at Maryborough, 11 December, 1995.
7. Author interview with Bob Mercer, at Nanango, 12 December, 1995.
8. Ibid.
9. Author interview with Harold Marshall, October, 1995.
10. SBT. 8 July, 1987.
11. Author interview with Chris Lloyd, Queensland Museum, October, 1995.

Chapter Ten

1. Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, letter reference RCC/bkf/C7, Kilkivan Shire Council.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Kilkivan Shire Council file, Elgin Vale, E4, 1987/88.
5. Notification of Change of Ownership certificate, Department of the Valuer General, dated 10 August, 1987, copy held in Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
6. Letter reference BAO/RKL 13/9 dated 25 September, 1987, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
7. For listings and returns see letter to Kilkivan Shire Council from Elders Pastoral, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
8. Letter reference RCC/bkf/E4, dated 9 October, 1987, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
9. Letter, reference BAO/RKL 13/9, dated 26 October, 1987, from Nanango Shire Council, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
10. Minutes of committee meeting, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.

11. For full details of this agreement as outlined in the indenture, see: Department of Local Government, reference MGM:MH dated 2 February, 1988, a copy of which is held in Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council.
12. Applications and accompanying letters may be found in, Elgin Vale file E4, 1987/88, and E4, 1989/90 Kilkivan Shire Council.
13. Minutes of the meetings of the management committee, held at Elgin Vale on Tuesday 26 July, 1988, Elgin Vale file, E4, 1987/88, Kilkivan Shire Council. See also: *Queensland Government Gazette* Number 96, 15 April, 1989, p 2162, col. 1.
14. SBT. 30 November, 1988, p 2.
15. Letter reference RCC/bkf/E4, Elgin Vale file E4, 1988/89, Kilkivan Shire Council.
16. For the sequence of letters concerning the construction of this causeway, including the letter written by Mr Douglas Porter giving permission for the causeway to be constructed on land owned by him, see: Elgin Vale file E4, 1989/90, Kilkivan Shire Council.
17. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 2 September, 1931, p 8.
18. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 7 October, 1931, p 7.
19. See various letters, Elgin Vale file E4, Kilkivan Shire Council.
20. Letter RAH:jad, Elgin Vale file E4, 1992/93, Kilkivan Shire Council.
21. Letter reference AJM/ajm, Elgin Vale file E4, Kilkivan Shire Council.

Chapter Eleven

1. Letter from Esme Hunter (nee Spencer) to the author, dated 11 January, 1996.
2. Death certificate, District Registrar's Office, Kingaroy.
3. SBT. 11 August, 1933, p 7.
4. State Archives of Queensland, file S, 1950-1959, A 21200.
5. For a copy of Spencer's letter see: State Archives of Queensland, file S 1950-1959, A 21200.
6. SBT. 22 April, 1954, p 5.
7. SBT. 12 August, 1954, p 7.
8. SBT. 3 April, 1958, p 1.
9. SBT. 17 April, 1958, p 1 and SBT. 24 April, 1958, p 2.
10. Author interview with Jack Brown at Goomeri, 8 December, 1995.
11. Letter to the author from Mrs Valmai Fowler, dated 21 January, 1996.
12. Interviews with Val Atthow, 19 and 20 February, 1996.
13. SBT. 16 November, 1961, p 23.
14. Letter from Milton Gibb-McIntosh to the author, dated 7 January, 1996. According to Spencer's son, Larry, T.H. Spencer did not purchase Sefton cattle station but merely leased crown land there.
15. Letter from Muriel Hazel Davidson to the author, dated 11 January, 1996.
16. Letter from Mrs Esme Hunter to the author, dated 11 January, 1996.

17. Kilkivan Shire Council minutes, 2 May, 1928, p 6.
18. Ibid, 1 August, 1928, p 6.
19. Ibid, 1 April, 1931, p 6.
20. Ibid, 6 September, 1933, p 4.
21. Ibid, 7 March, 1934, p 6.
22. Ibid, 1 October, 1935, p 3.
23. Ibid, 7 May, 1946, p 7.
24. Ibid, 2 September, 1931, p 8.
25. Ibid, 6 January, 1932, p 3.
26. Ibid, 2 March, 1932, pp 2-3.
27. Letter to the author from Mrs Valmai Fowler, dated 21 January, 1996.
28. State Archives of Queensland, file S, 1950-1959 A 21200.
29. SBT. 6 February, 1958, p 1.
30. SBT. 13 February, 1958, p 5.
31. SBT. 17 April, 1958, p 2.
32. SBT. 6 March, 1958, p 2.
33. SBT. 23 April, 1959, p 3.
34. SBT. 23 December, 1959, p 17.
35. Ibid.
36. SBT. 7 January, 1960, p 3 and SBT. 14 January, 1960, p 21.
37. SBT. 21 January, 1960, p 20.
38. SBT. 11 February, 1960, p 17. For a full description of T.H. Spencer's travels, written by Spencer himself, see: SBT. 23 April, 1959, p 3; 23 December, 1959, p 17; 31. December, 1959, p 4; 7 January, 1960, p 3; 14 January, 1961, p 21; 21 January, 1960, p 20; 28 January, 1960, p 15; 4 February, 1960, p 17; and 11 February, 1960, p 17.
39. SBT. 4 October, 1951, p 5.
40. Ibid.
41. Author interview with Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer, 31 December, 1995.
42. Author interview with Trevor Neilsen, 2 January, 1996.
43. Death certificate, District Registrar's Office. Kingaroy.
44. Letter to the author from Mrs Valmai Fowler, dated 21 January, 1996.
45. SBT. 7 December, 1961, p 24.
46. Author interview with Dr H.C. (Larry) Spencer, 31 December, 1995.

Appendices

Appendix One

Register of accidents, Elgin Vale mill, 19 October, 1963 (presumed date) to 27 June, 1984
(NB The last date given in this appendix was not sourced from the register).

DATE	TIME	NAME	PLACE	CAUSE	NATURE OF INJURY
19th Oct	10 a.m.	W.O. Schultz	Case Docking Saw.	Twisting board pulled hand onto saw.	Laceration to knuckle on the third finger of the left hand.
30th Oct	3.30 p.m.	K.J. Adams	Gulleting Machine.	Piece of emery flew into his eye.	Injury to the right eye.
18th July	8.30 a.m.	E.G. Kerle	Case Benching Saw.	Hand slipped on piece of wood.	Injury to index finger on left hand.
3rd August	2 p.m.	D. McDonald	Tailer out on No 1 Saw.	Piece of wood flew up and hit his eye.	Injury to left eye.
l9th August	2 p.m	K.J. Adams	Firing the boiler.	Piece of wood caught on boiler door.	Infected hand caused by the splinter.
1965					
3rd March	3 p.m.	L.M.G. Hawkins	Cutting firewood on docker.	Caught finger on saw.	Abrasions to middle and ring finger.
13th Sept.	2.15 p.m.	E.G. Kerle	Case Docking Saw.	Hand slipped on piece of wood.	Lacerations to all fingers on left hand.
1966					
28th May	7.30 a.m.	W.O. Schultz	Working on house 10 WH.	Fell off ladder onto piece of wood.	Injured muscle in back.

DATE	TIME	NAME	PLACE	CAUSE	NATURE 0F INJURY
22nd Sept	10 a.m.	D.J. Smith	Helping on No 1 Docker.	Jumped over skids getting mixed up in timber across skids.	Injured left knee.
7/4/67	1.30 p.m.	Emil Gustav Kerle	No I Docking Saw.	Caught finger on saw.	Laceration of left Index finger.
10/4/68	2 p.m.	William Otto Schultz	At Planner.	Chip hit left eye.	Sore eye.
2/9/68	9.20 a.m.	Emil Gustav Kerle	No 1 Docking Saw.	Docker belt broke and hit him in the face.	Abrasions to face, broken spectacles. I saw the accident happen and immediately rendered first aid. Did not warrant a doctor's attention.
20/10/69	9.30 a.m.	Dudley J. Smith	Changing saw on Rack bench.	Saw jammed while wheeling to bench.	Tooth cut on side of right leg.
5/3/70	1.20 p.m.	Lenard Barritt	Grinding circular saws.	Piece of grinding flew into eye.	Left eye irritation admitted to hospital observation 1 day.
17/10/70	8.40 a.m.	Raymond William Schmidt	No 1 bench rollers.	Caught left hand under rollers and flitch.	Squashed 1st three fingers on left hand.
2/13/72	1.30 p.m	Allan Richard Kachel	Trolley on No 1 Tailer out.	Caught fingers under flitch.	Skinned first 2 fingers on L. hand.
7/8/72	9.30 a.m.	Allan Richard Kachel	Tailing out on board of No 1 bench.	Throwing board on No 1 bench.	Deep cut to 3rd finger L. hand, and abrasions to 4th finger L. hand. Taken to Nanango Hospital.
16/8/72	8.30 a.m.	Barry William Hillcoat	Rack Bench.	Wet log.	Cut to 2nd and 3rd fingers on R. hand.
22/9/72	8.30 a.m.	Kevin Robert Dow	No 1 Bench.	Slipped at corner of bench.	# rib on L. side.
22/9/72	1.30 p.m.	William Otto Schultz	Rubbish Pier.	Unknown (Fell).	Fatal.
14/12/72	1.30 p.m.	Emil Gustav Kerle	Under Mill.	Stood up under belt.	Cut on scalp. Taken by Ambulance to Nanango Hospital.

DATE	TIME	NAME	PLACE	CAUSE	NATURE 0F INJURY
9/3/73	2.15 p.m.	Allan Francis Jones	Rack Bench.	Hook slipped.	Strained muscle in back.
18/9/73	12.15 p.m.	Lionel George Prendergast	From bench to sawroom.	Dropped saw off stool.	Cut foot.
24/10/73	10.30 a.m.	Edwin Neil Smith	Docking Bench.	Moving board to rollers.	Strained back muscles.
26/10/73	12.30 p.m.	Robert James Parker	No 1 Tailing out.	Sawdust	Irritation to eye.
2/12/74	1.30 p.m.	T.P. Coyne	No 1 Bench Tailing out.	Piece of wood pierced L. arm.	Splinter embedded above L. elbow.
17/4/75	1.30 p.m.	Allan Richard Kachel	No 1 Bench	Flitch bounced throwing hand onto saw.	Cuts to middle and index fingers on R. hand. Stitched by doctor.
19/6/75	8.30 a.m.	Aubrey Graham Richards	Log yard.	Stepped into hole.	Sprained L. ankle.
10/8/76	8.45 a.m.	Smith, Edwin Neil	Mill.	Lifting Cant Hook.	Strained back.
9/9/76	8.00 a.m.	Kachel, Keith John	-	-	Cut on L. thumb.
7/10/76	p.m.	Lewis, Codford Arthur	Scrub. (Twine)	Slipped on rock.	Sprained L. ankle.
19/3/76	10 a.m.	C.E. Finney	-	Foot on stone.	Sprained R. ankle.
11/2/77	9.15 a.m.	R.G. Hockey	Rack Bench.	Cant Hook caught while rolling log.	Swollen R. knee cap.
18/2/77	3.30 p.m.	N.A. Mitchell	-	Fingers under moving trolley.	Lacerations to small finger L. hand
21/6/77	8.50 a.m.	E.N. Smith	Docker.	-	Squashed finger next to little on R. hand. Dressed.
22/6/77	4.30 p.m.	N.A. Mitchell	Under Mill.	Dropped saw.	Cut to R. knee.
22/6/77	4.30 p.m.	P.T. Crane		Heavy lifting.	? hernia - sent to Doctor.
11/7/77	3.40 p.m.	W.K. Hockey	Docker.	Swinging hand close to saw.	Cut index finger and thumb R. hand. To Doctor.

DATE	TIME	NAME	PLACE	CAUSE	NATURE 0F INJURY
1/8/77	-	A. Kachel	No 1 Bench.	Lifting flitch.	Strained R. shoulder.
2/8/77	1.30 p.m.	R.E. Hockey	No 1 Docker.	Walked into piece of timber.	Injured R. knee.
23/8/77	4 30 p.m.	D. Frohloff	Crane offsider.	Bumped finger with log.	Middle L. finger.
21/10/77	9.20 a.m.	A.P. Houston	No 1 Bench.	Caught finger on roller.	Cut to middle finger L. hand.
2/11/77	4.15 p.m.	A.P. Houston	No 1 Bench - tailing out.	Came into contact with saw.	Lacerated ring finger L. hand. First Aid -> hospital.
10/11/77	1.30 p.m.	K.J. Kachel	Near Grinding machine.	Piece of emery flung off emery wheel.	Piece in R. eye - infected.
22/3/78	8 a.m.	N.A. Mitchell	Rack.	Using Cant Hook.	Sprain R. hand.
31/5/78	?	K.R. Dow	Dockerman.	Not reported.	Strained back (went to chiropractor 2/6/78).
3/7/78	8 a.m.	A.P. Houston	Rack Bench.	Caught L. forearm between 2 logs rolling.	
10/7/78	7.05 a.m.	D.N. Frohloff	No 1 Rollers.	Struck with stick while running belt on pulley.	Sore ribs and R. arm. Ambulance called.
27/6/84*	12.20 p.m.				Lacerated fingers Right hand.

*Not sourced from Register of Accidents.

Appendix Two

Divisions, trading names, locations and staff numbers of Carricks Group, 1978. Sourced from the annual report to staff, 1978.

From this appendix it may be seen that after the takeover by Carricks the mill at Elgin Vale came under the Laheys trading name of the company, while Wilson Hart retained its own trading name. Both were incorporated as separate entities under the Wood Products Division of Carricks.

DIVISION	TRADING NAMES	LOCATION	PEOPLE
Corporate	Carricks	Sherwood	9
Furniture	Elite Furniture—Qld.	Sherwood	183
	Elite Furniture—N.S.W.	Sydney	139
	Paramont Furniture	Melbourne	28
			350
Merchandise	James Campbell & Sons	Sherwood	47
		Albion	70
		Corinda	25
		Lawnton	19
		Maroochydore	23
		Springwood	19
		Toowoomba	28
		Townsville	23
		Currumbin	5
		Lismore NSW	10
	Campbells Wholesale	Sherwood	48
			317

Wood Products	Laheys	Corinda	41
		Cairns	2
		Inglewood	30
		Goondiwindi	29
		Miles	15
		Elginvale	12
	Wilson Hart	Maryborough	78
	Munro & Lever	Grevillia	96
	Venlay Plywood	Grevillia	66
			369
Wilson Hart	Wilson Hart	Maryborough	29
		Eidsvold	22
		Theodore	23
		Moura	18
		Gladstone	5
		Rockhampton	53
		Mackay	20
		Townsville	21
			191
			1236

Bibliography

Most of the information in this history has come from primary source research and through interviews with persons who have either worked at the Elgin Vale mill or have been in other ways associated with the mill or the region.

Primary Sources:

The following is a list of the documents taken during field research from the Elgin Vale sawmill offices on 9 December, 1995. These documents formed the major part of primary source research. All documents recovered from the site have been conserved and are currently held at the archives of the Kilkivan Shire Council.

Account book, stock week ending 1978.
Account book, stock week ending 1976.
Account book, stock January, 1976—1977.
Account book, 1968-1981.
Account book, 1974/75.
Agreement document regarding: 82hr for 8 days per fortnight etc. and Annual holiday ... (August 1975).
Agreement document, 27/3/1975 Regarding Show holiday.
Alfloc Water Treatment Service.
Annual report 75-76 Timber Research and Development Advisory Council.
Annual report Timber Research & Development Advisory Council year ending 30th June, 1974.
Australian Forest Industries Journal Vol 45 No 3 April, 1979.
Australian Post Office 24/6/1975 MSI 1474: Nanango—Elgin Vale (Block 59).
Carricks Group 3rd Annual Report to staff Year ended 31/12/1978.
Daily Cutting Book 1974 to 1976.
Destinations of loads log.
Division of Occupational Safety Certificate No 1143141.
Repairs logs.
Factory/shop renewal certificate 31/1/1988.
Fire permits (various, [in poor condition]).
Gerrard Strapping Systems 24/4/1979 PM:ET.
Gerrard Strapping Systems 14/3/1979 ET.
Gerrard Strapping Systems 28/3/1979 ET.

Hazard Analysis Sheet.
Ipswich & West Moreton Permanent Benefit Building and Investment Society. 12/11/1976.
Laheys—Purchase order No 5208.
Log cutting sheets 1978.
Maxwell Water Treatment Books (Water Treatment Log Sheet).
Memo 28/2/1975 Safety at Work Reference IMcB.HP
National Safety Council of Australia 23/0/1976.
Operating Instructions. Signode Model AM. Combination Strapping Tool.
P Test; NA_250_3 test; TDS test (Total dissolved solids). [In very poor condition]
Register of Accidents—Elgin Vale Mill.
Safety Code—Timber Getting Industry.
Safety Equipment. (In very poor condition).
Sawmilling Safety Code.
Sketch of Mill site showing position of mill in relation to houses, roads, creek, etc.
Stock-take Instructions—Bob Mercer, Elgin Vale.
Stumpage accounts.
Summary of Inquiry Statistics June, 1976.
The Resources of Our Organisation are at Your Service—Intercolonial Boring Co. Ltd.
Timber grading and branding footnotes 4/5 to Table 28.6L(A).
Various (7) stock books.
Wage rates operative as from 16th August, 1976 (Basic Wage).
Weekly Mill Production and Recovery Targets.
Weekly figures log 1978.
Wilson & Hart & Co. Limited. 9/6/1975 Workers' Compensation HWM.LW with claims 1973/74.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 25/10/1976 SD.HP.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. Memo 8/7/1975 JL.HP.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 20/10/1975 /HP.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 12/3/1979 KW/HH.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited.—Country Mill Price List Effective 12/5/1975.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 25/11/1974 HWM.LW.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 27/6/1975 JMcB.LW.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 2/7/1975 IMcB.HP.
Wilson Hart & Co. Limited. 5/4/1979 RHD.LW.

Newspapers and Periodicals:

The *Gympie Times.*
The *Maryborough Chronicle.*

The *Nanango News.*
The *Nanango Advocate.*
The *South Burnett Times.*
The *Sunday Mail.*

Private Interviews:
All interviews were recorded on audio tape. Where it has been necessary to ensure clarity of detail or, in some places to exclude defamatory remarks, the author has carried out a limited amount of editing. Where necessary some grammar has also been corrected. All oral histories have been preserved and are currently held by the author. The following persons were interviewed for this history:

Val Atthow.
Jack Brown.
Irene Coleman.
Lucy Collard.
Leon Franz.
Graham Knight.
Madge Locke.
Jim and Thelma Knipe.
Harold Marshall.
Bob Mercer.
Douglas Porter.
Ruth Porter.
Graeme Ryan.
Vic Wilson.

Private Correspondence:
Private correspondences providing information concerning the mill, the district and the principal characters involved in this history were received from the following people:

Rod Barnard.
Muriel Davidson.
Moya Dickson.
Valmai Fowler.
Doris Gibb-McIntosh.
Milton Gibb-McIntosh.
Esme Hunter.

Edna MacPherson Sabato.
Effie Mooney.
Trevor Nielsen.
Peter Olds, Wm. Olds and Sons, Maryborough.
Ruth Palmer.
Mrs E.M. Schultz.
F. Spencer.
R.E. Spencer.
Ailsa Stanton.
John Underwood.
Mrs Marlene Wilson.

All private correspondence has been preserved and is currently held by the author.

Memoir:

Interlude at Elgin Vale, by Peter Olds.

Secondary Sources:

Published sources concerning the mill and its history are rare, although the following two publications contain a small amount of information that researchers may find of use:

Logan, Dulcie, *Where Two Rivers Run,* Kilkivan Shire Council, 1988.

Murphy, J.E., and Easton, E.W., *Wilderness to Wealth,* Nanango, Wondai, Kingaroy, Murgon and Kilkivan Shire Councils, 1950.

Index

Illustrations are indicated by *italic* page numbers

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The Coffee-pot Mill is a story of great struggle, endurance and triumph set in the difficult years of the early Queensland timber industry. Following the arrival of the rail line to Kilkivan in 1886—a line that was later extended to reach the sites of Goomeri, Murgon, Wondai, Kingaroy and finally Nanango—the timber industry on the South Burnett began to grow quite dramatically. Throughout the region sawmills of varying sizes began to appear so that the massive amounts of logs could be processed before being sent by rail to places such as Brisbane and Maryborough. This is the story of one such mill, the steam-powered sawmill at Elgin Vale in the Kilkivan Shire.

Today the difficulties of setting up such an enterprise have largely been forgotten, but the mill was, initially at least, the work of one man, a powerful Goomeri businessman named Thomas Herbert Spencer. This book investigates the trials of moving the mill from its original site at Sefton, the dangers and traumas of those first few years of operations, the fire that subsequently destroyed the mill, its rising, phoenix-like, quite literally from the ashes, its power as a financial and social asset to the community and its eventual decline. Dr Matthews also gives us a keenly researched insight into the man who created the mill and investigates in depth his complex and sometimes controversial character.

In *The Coffee-pot Mill* the author allows us to experience the exciting and colourful background of life at Elgin Vale, and offers us an intriguing look at the characters, the tragic deaths, the harmonies and disharmonies of village life, and draws a fascinating portrait of the small rural community that sprang up at the site of the mill and subsequently died with it when the mill was eventually closed.

This is a compelling history, gracefully written and logically presented that readers will find both entertaining and informative.

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