

A6964(VII)

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

1989

I, Stephen Simpson give my
permission to Lesley Dickinson

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for
research, publication and/or broadcasting (delete one of
these if required) and for copies to be lodged in
the archives of the University

of Newcastle

for the use of other bona fide researchers.

Signed Stephen Simpson

Date 19-7-1989

Interviewer

O.F.C. History. Oral History. S.Simpson. L.Dickinson.1989.

Stephen Simpson is a quiet gentleman of cheerful
dis O.F.C. Oral History Project. his positive outlook on life
has The Life of Stephen Simpson years. He was born at home
in and his Trade of Bootmaking in Lambton. as one brother
old Summary. himself who is still living. His two sisters have
bot Lesley Dickinson. 1989. r was a coal miner who worked at

Wallsend "C" pit, and his mother looked after the children.
Jesmond in the early 1900's was, like many other towns, a
very close knit community. People depended on and helped
each other. This co-operation was not always because of
personal wishes but because of necessity in order to survive.

There was no running water to Mr. Simpson's house in those
days and water had to be drawn from a nearby well. As
most people had no means of independent transport, fruit and
vegetables and meat was delivered from Wallsend by horse and
cart. The church had a great influence on the people,
Mr. Simpson being one of the oldest members of the
Methodist church that he attends.

At the age of fourteen and nine months Mr. Simpson began
his apprenticeship under Mr. Walton, Bootmaker and Shoe
repairer in Russell road, New Lambton. After being in his
employ for the required six years, Mr. Simpson went to
Lambton, where he set himself up at the backyard of a public
bar in Morehead street. Business went well and he was able
to employ two apprentices, one being his son-in-law, who
later on went to the ambulance service and attained a high

O.F.C. Oral History. S. Simpson. L. Dickinson. 1989.

position. The other apprentice went to work on a

O.F.C. History. Oral History. S.Simpson. L.Dickinson.1989.

Stephen Simpson is a quiet gentleman of cheerful disposition which together with his positive outlook on life has sustained him well over the years. He was born at home in Jesmond, delivered by a mid-wife. He has one brother older than himself who is still living. His two sisters have both passed on. His father was a coal miner who worked at Wallsend "C" pit, and his mother looked after the children. Mr. Jesmond in the early 1900's was, like many other towns, a very close knit community. People depended on and helped each other. This co-operation was not always because of personal wishes but because of necessity in order to survive. There was no running water to Mr. Simpson's house in those days and water had to be drawn from a nearby well. As most people had no means of independent transport, fruit and vegetables and meat was delivered from Wallsend by horse and cart. The church had a great influence on the people, Mr. Simpson being one of the oldest members of the Methodist church that he attends. At the age of fourteen and nine months Mr. Simpson began his apprenticeship under Mr. Walton, Bootmaker and Shoe repairer in Russell road, New Lambton. After being in his employ for the required six years, Mr. Simpson went to Lambton, where he set himself up at the backyard of a public bar in Morehead street. Business went well and he was able to employ two apprentices, one being his son-in-law, who later on went to the ambulance service and attained a high

O.F.C. Oral History. S. Simpson. L. Dickinson. 1989.

position. The other apprentice went to work on a baker's cart.

In 1937, against the advice of his brother who was a builder, Mr. Simpson bought a shop in Elder Street, Lambton. He still works there in the mornings, and can usually be found in his work-room at the back of the shop repairing the favourite shoes that people have brought in for him. The number of bootmakers has drastically declined over the years. In Lambton alone at one stage there was at least six, but as Mr. Simpson points out, he is the last one. He blames mechanisation and the cheapness of imported shoes for the demise of the trade and history bears this out.

To get to work Mr. Simpson used to catch the steam tram from Jesmond at the back of the present day Woolworths site. The tram used to go up through the cutting and along Howe street which had tracks set in its dirt surface. A short walk up Morehead street would take him past the then fenced-in Lambton Park. The park was used to hold the animals that pulled the carts of the shop keepers. A council employee, a man named Pollock was responsible for its maintenance. The present day library which stands in the corner of the park was the original council chambers.

For entertainment, folk would visit each other's houses or go to the moving-picture shows at Dad Phelans at Wallsend, or to Young and Garrity's theatre where the Wallsend arcade now stands.

Name of Project: The Life of Stephen Simpson, son. 1989. pl.
and His Trade of Bootmaking

Mr Simpson, could in Lambton. asking what type of work your
parents did?

Name of Interviewer: Lesley Dickinson. He used to work in
what they call Wallsend C Pit.

Name of Interviewee: Stephen Simpson.

A: Wallsend.

Age at time of Interview: 84 years.?

A: He got there on the steam tram.

Date of Interview: 19th, July 1989.

A: I was born in Jesmond, in Ralph street.

Place of Interview: In Mr. Simpson's home,

A: Yes, Mrs-I just Williams street, Jesmond. was now.

She was the midwife, she used to live around the street.

She brought me into the world. (chuckles)

Q: How many brothers and sisters (did) have you got?

A: I've got a brother and two sisters, there was four

of us in the family. Two boys, two girls.

Q: What was Jesmond like when you were a young boy?

A: Oh well, it was just a dilapidated place, the roads
was very bad, no lights, we had no light at home, we had a
kerosene lamp. We used to mend shoes under the kerosene
lamp over there. I used to do a little bit after I come
home from when I was serving my apprenticeship, to get a
few extra shakels. We never had laid on water, we only
had the underground well. We used to draw all our water
out of the well.

Q: Was that in your garden or...?

A: Just around the corner.

Q: What about cooking, what sort of fuel was in the home?

A: A fuel stove. We had a hob stove, at first. What they
call a hob. An oven like a box oven on one side with a
fire place and you push your hot coals underneath the
oven.

Q: What about things like baths?

A: Baths? We used to bath in the tub. We never had a bath.

Q: What school did you attend?

A: I went to Jesmond school up here when I was about five
year old.

Q: What do you remember most about your school days?

A: Oh not much in those days, just played football or cricket
or something like that for sport, when you got up a
bit there was more, but when you were smaller, well, you
used to make your own fun. We used to go trapping birds
in the bush. They used to go shooting rabbits here just
up the road up here. The chap across the road used to
have a dog and he'd go out with his gun and beagle hound
and round the rabbits out He'd many a time come home with
a rabbit.

Q: What did your family do for relaxation, at the
weekends?

A: Well in those days, relaxation in those days was
visiting other people. Not going to the picture shows or
anything like that. I couldn't tell you when I first
started to go to the pictures but I was pretty old when I
first went to the pictures.

Q: What sort of people did you go to visit?

A: Oh, friends that we knew around about here, you'd go and
visit friends and sit and talk to them for a couple of hours
of a night and then come home and go to bed.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p1.

Mr Simpson, could I begin by asking what type of work your parents did?

A: Coal miner-my father was a coal miner. He used to work in what they call Wallsend C Pit.

Q: And where was that?

A: Wallsend.

Q: And how did he used to get there?

A: He got there on the steam tram.

Q: Where were you born?

A: I was born in Jesmond, in Ralph street.

Q: And you were born at home?

A: Yes, Mrs-I just can't think what her name was now.

Q: She was the midwife, she used to live around the street.

A: She brought me into the world. (chuckles)

Q: How many brothers and sisters (did) have you got?

A: I've got a brother and two sisters, there was four

of us in the family. Two boys, two girls.

Q: What was Jesmond like when you were a young boy?

A: Oh well, it was just a dilapidated place, the roads

was very bad, no lights, we had no light at home, we had a

kerosene lamp. We used to mend shoes under the kerosene

lamp over there. I used to do a little bit after I come

home from when I was serving my apprenticeship, to get a

few extra shakels. We never had laid on water, we only

had the underground well. We used to draw all our water

out of the well.

Q: Was that in your garden or...?

A: Just around the corner.

Q: What about cooking, what sort of fuel was in the home?

A: A fuel stove. We had a hob stove, at first. What they

call a hob. An oven like a box oven on one side with a

fire place and you push your hot coals underneath the

oven.

Q: What about things like baths?

A: Baths? We used to bath in the tub. We never had a bath.

Q: What school did you attend?

A: I went to Jesmond school up here when I was about five

year old.

Q: What do you remember most about your school days?

A: Oh not much in those days, just played football or cricket

or something like that for sport, when you got up a

bit there was more, but when you were smaller, well, you

used to make your own fun. We used to go trapping birds

in the bush. They used to go shooting rabbits here just

up the road up here. The chap across the road used to

have a dog and he'd go out with his gun and beagle hound

and round the rabbits out He'd many a time come home with

a rabbit.

Q: What did your family do for relaxation, at the

weekends?

A: Well in those days, relaxation in those days was visiting other people. Not going to the picture shows or anything like that. I couldn't tell you when I first started to go to the pictures but I was pretty old when I first went to the pictures.

Q: What sort of people did you go to visit?

A: Oh, friends that we knew around about here, you'd go and visit friends and sit and talk to them for a couple of hours of a night and then come home and go to bed.

* Vamp Upper front part of boot or shoe.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p2.

- Q: And was the church very influential in those days?
A: Yes. I'd say I'm one of the oldest members of the church, living, that goes to church down there now.
Q: And what church would that be?
A: Methodist church. I used to say the collection piece every anniversary. Before they took up the collection I'd recite a piece, you know, to tell them that they were going to come around with the plate.
Q: In those days, for collections, did they have just an open plate?
A: Yes, just an open plate, put your money on the open plate.
Q: At what age did you begin your apprenticeship?
A: I was fourteen and nine months, nearly fifteen, and I served my apprenticeship for six years.
Q: Was that the usual?
A: Yes, in those days it was, and after a while they brought it down to five years, but when I was signed over, it was six years.
Q: Who was your employer?
A: Mr Walton of New Lambton.
Q: Exactly where was his shop?
A: Opposite where the school was.
Q: What, the New Lambton school?
A: New Lambton school, you know where the road comes around, it goes up through to Cardiff, well then part of the way up you see the school on your left there.
Q: So it was on the busy road, the Russell side, across from there?
A: Yes, yes.
Q: What were your duties?
A: Duties? What?..
Q: When you were doing your apprenticeship, what were you expected to do?
A: Oh, mend shoes, sew shoes, stitch shoes. Everything was done by hand at our place. All we had was a patching machine, that's all.
Q: What was that for?
A: If you wanted to put a patch on a shoe or put a new vamp* on a shoe. You don't do that sort of thing these days.
Q: Did you sell shoes in the shop as well?
A: No. Not in those days you didn't.
Q: So, you made the shoes and they went out to the various shops to be sold?
A: Yes...No, no we mended the shoes, a repair shop it was and you learnt to make boots at the place.
Q: At the same time?
A: At the same time, in your spare time, see? Work it in with your other work.
Q: What sort of way did they did they come up, on the train or?
A: I remember one time a fellow came up with a side of leather when I was working at New Lambton serving my apprenticeship. He come out to sell us some leather and he had a side of leather with him and he come out in a cab, you know, you've saw pictures of old cabs, the inside in the middle box-cabbie, the driver sitting up in the back. And you're

* Vamp Upper front part of boot or shoe.

Q: Well, I've read that miners had to walk some miles some times, to get work...

A: Oh yes that's true. Underground, yes. I went down the pit with my father one day. They get what you call 'cabled out' into another section. You cable out every--I don't know whether it was three months, you'd go to a different part of the pit to work. And, I went down with him once and you had to shift your tools from that place to the other place, see? And I went down with him down under the pit and we had to walk, oh, I'd say we'd walked two mile underneath. We went in the ground. Do you know Wallsend? On the way, going out through here to Boolaroo and those places. The road, the park's on your right. Well just before you get to the park there used to be a tunnel there and that's where walked down through there. I had a kerosene little lamp on my head to see where I was going. (chuckles)

Q: Did you mend a lot of boots then because the miners did so much...?

A: Oh yes, when the war was on I owned a shop in Lambton those days and there was a lot of repairs done in those days. I had that much work that I used to have to close the door. I couldn't cope with the work that I had to do when the war was on.

Q: What sort of work did you do there?

A: Repairing shoes they was.

Q: Why was there more work on during the war years?

A: There was nobody to do them, see. A lot of them had gone to the war and that. Bootmakers was exempt in those days.

Q: Well that's understandable isn't it, sort of an essential service really?

A: Yes, that's right, that's true.

Q: What sort of materials did you use in your work--leather?

A: Oh yes, leather and skins, hides and...

Q: Where did you get those from?

A: I used to buy them from Newcastle. John Wilkinson had a shop here. We used to buy it through him.

Q: What in Hunter St or...?

A: Yes he was in Hunter St, just near the bank corner. One part of it. He shifted from different places and when he finished up he finished up out at Broadmeadow behind the picture show in Dennison St,. I think it is behind the picture show that runs into town that street.

Q: Where did you get the...uh,

A: Well he'd get them from Sydney and buy them through the Tanners and that. Other times we bought through different places in Sydney, we used to buy through Cole Johnston, Pessey & Gates.

Q: And they came up? By?

A: They came up, yes.

Q: What sort of way did they did they come up, on the train or?

A: I remember one time a fellow came up with a side of leather when I was working at New Lambton serving my apprenticeship. He come out to sell us some leather and he had a side of leather with him and he come out in a cab, you know, you've saw pictures of old cabs, the inside in the middle box-cabbie, the driver sitting up in the back. And you're

O.F.C. History. Transcript of tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p4.

- Q: Drawn by...?
A: Drawn by...a horse, haven't you seen one of them?
Q: Oh, in pictures...
A: Pictures, that's right. Well I've seen them here, driving and when he was in our place, he waited there until he served us and then he went back out and got in the cab and he'd go to the next one where he wanted to go. Instead of hiring a taxi, he used to hire a cab see, there were very few motor cars in those days.
Q: What was the difference between a taxi and a hansom cab?
A: Well a taxi is a motor car-Today, well there was none of them in those days, see, they were all cabs.
Q: Where did you get the nails for your boots?
A: Well we used to get them through well different places. We'd get them through Sydney. Johnston, Puzzey and Gates, Coles-Wilkinson that used to be in Newcastle.
Q: What were conditions like for you in the depression?
A: No good. I didn't do any work for three weeks. I said to myself "This is no good." I had two little girls, two babies, see? I did no work for three weeks and I went to a chap in Lambton and I said to him "Any chance of letting that one room you got down in-it was in the hotel yard between the hotel and the picture show."
Q: In Morehead St?
A: In Morehead St. It was a one room there one time, well that's where I started in '31,... there.
Q: So you became self-employed?
A: Yeah, that's where I started my business in 1931, there, and then later on, uh years... 5 or 6 years or something after that, after, that's the place where we used to, we used to shut the door because we couldn't get enough, couldn't get anybody to, you know, there were that many shoes in there, nobody could get in the shop. So we had to shut the door. Anytime I'd hear them, they'd come down and look at the door and say, "Oh,gee he's closed again."
Q: You'd be hiding in the back!?
A: Yes,(laughing) but I was in there working, see. I couldn't take anymore because I couldn't jump over what I had there. I had that much work to do. And I had two apprentices, in my time.
Q: Oh, did you?
A: I had a Ken Ford work for me, and then my son-in-law, Harry Palliser. I learnt him the trade, he married my daughter, and he started in Cardiff, but you got to know the business too, you know, he's not cut out for a shop business, he gave it away out there. Then he went from there to the Ambulance. He went to the top of the Ambulance in Newcastle.
Q: And the other apprentice that you had?
A: He finished up too. When he finished mending boots he went on to a Baker's cart. Then I learnt my son the trade up in Elder street.
Q: Wood fence, double gate, and he used to put the horses in there.
Q: The horses that drew the carts and things?
A: Yes. People that owned the shop and you know that had a horse and cart at night-time, they'd put their horses down there, the butchers and bakers and all of them.
Q: And did they pay rental?
A: Yes, rental-not very much in those days.

Q: Where the shop is now?

A: Where the shop is now. A chap from over the road, a Mr. Lyons he used to have a garage there one time, but its not there now. He came over to me, and he said to me "Do you want to buy a shop up in Elder street?" and I said, "Yes, I'd be interested." I went up and had a look at it and I thought it was all right. I got my brother to look at it and I'd say my brother's not a business man either, he said to me, "I wouldn't buy this," he said. "It'll fall down," he said "It's full of white ants." So I just wiped him and I went to another fellow. Sam Spruce, that had a bit of property in Lambton and I said to him; "Come and have a look at a property for us, Sam will you?" (he said) "Yeah." So I took him down to have a look at it. He went through it and there was a residence at the back, and it was let, and I had the shop on the front. He said, after he looked at it, he said, "Buy it," he said, "The rent that you get from the back," he said, "Will pay for the shop." "It only cost £250.

Q: What year was that?

A: That would be about '26 or '27.

Q: And how has Lambton changed, the shopping centre since '27? Any vivid memories there?

A: Oh, they've altered all the street in Lambton from what it used to be. One time it was a big dip on one side just over from the other side of where we are and you parked too close and all the petrol would run out of your car. So that's why they've got those steps there, they took about three feet off the road and put the steps in, which was a good idea.

Q: Yes, so who put--the council did that?

A: Oh, yes, the council did that.

Q: Where did the council meet in those days?

A: Down at the Council chambers. You know where the Council chambers were? The Library is opposite the Hotel. That's the Council chambers.

Q: So now its the Library?

A: Now its the Library.

Q: And the park, has it always been that size?

A: Oh, yes, yes, yes. One man used to look after that park, with a push mower.

Q: Oh, really, a push mower?

A: A push mower, not an electric mower. His name was Mr. Pollock.

Q: Mr. Pollock, and he was a Council employee?

A: Yes, Yes.

Q: A very fit one!?

A: Yes (laughter) he did a good job for them there. 'Course, he didn't grow all the flowers like they've got here, but he used to keep that park. It was fenced all the way round, that park in those days.

Q: What sort of fencing was it?

Q: Wood fence, double gate, and he used to put the horses in there.

Q: The horses that drew the carts and things?

A: Yes. People that owned the shop and you know that had a horse and cart at night-time, they'd put their horses down there, the butchers and bakers and all of them.

Q: And did they pay rental?

A: Yes, rental-not very much in those days.

- Q: Must got a bit boggy in wet weather?
A: Oh, yes it would, in this weather we've got now!
(laughter).
- Q: How has shoemaking changed over the years, when did you notice that things were changing--women's fashions as well. Women's shoes, did you make them, women's shoes or..?
A: Yes, I made them. They've changed the system altogether now. Everything is cemented together. They've got machines that you just put your last* and your upper into the machine and you pull the handle and the machine clamps it all up and sticks it all in one go. I've been down to see them in Sydney, but in our days we used to sit down and make them on the knee, stitch them.
- Q: How long would it take you to make a pair?
A: Oh, you could make a pair of shoes in a day, but you wouldn't make them in a day, see, because you've got your toe stiffeners and your heel stiffeners and all that. And then your soles to cut out, and well, you can only do so much. You'd be making, say, half-a-dozen pair at once. Do a little bit to that this time and then when the other fellows turn come round you'd do something else to it. You'd finish up that you'd have them all done later on.
- Q: What sort of material did you use for the stiffeners?
A: Leather.
- Q: Did you start to import shoes at all?
A: No, never imported any shoes. You can buy imported ones now, through Coles, there's half-a-dozen of them, Richies, different ones, Johnsons, they all import shoes. You could get an import license to import your own, but I reckon it was wrong to import all these because when they sold importing, all these they closed our shops up see? We had about 4000 bootmakers and now you wouldn't--well we had about 6 bootmakers in Lambton when I started there, we've got one now.
- Q: Who were the other bootmakers in Lambton?
A: There was Jack Morris, Danny Bough and his son. There was--I just forget, he used to be in the hotel around the corner from where I am was, he the shop there. And then there was Ralph Budden up where I am now, he had a shop then. Then I started there and when I started there, an old chap from up the street came into the--down to the--they all used to collect and say hello to the bootmaker and you know talk to everybody. The window was open, you could talk to me through the window. This old fellow said to me, "I was just talking to an old chap up the road there and he said, he said he'll give you three weeks" he said, "And you'll be shut up." I said "Yeah?" I said "We'll see how long it takes." I'm still there and its been 58 years, not three weeks.(chuckle)
- Q: And your wife, did she do any work at all?
A: No she never done any-- work in the shop or anything.
Q: She looked after the children?
A: Yes.
- Q: That's a big enough job in itself isn't it?
A: She was a homely sort of a woman.

* A model of the human foot used in making shoes.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p7.

Q: And the electric light, do you remember that coming on?

A: We had electric lights put in here before when I was only a baby. The council put them in, but the council went broke, the electric light went broke too.

Q: So they were there, but you couldn't use them?

A: We never had them at our place, but there, I always remember there was a chap up the street here that I used to know. He had all the switches and everything in the house-- but no lights.

Q: Your brother what is his name?

A: Jack.

Q: Jack, he was a carpenter wasn't he? Where did he work?

A: He worked for himself.

Q: So he was responsible for building quite a few houses in the area?

A: Oh, he built houses everywhere.

Q: What about building materials, how did he transport

those, a horse and cart?

A: He used to have a horse and cart when he first started, then he got an old T model Ford.

Q: So there was quite a different world.

A: Mmm.

Q: How about the mail deliveries. How often did you get mail in those days?

A: Twice a day, morning and afternoon. Better than now--once a day!

Q: Did you get it at the weekend, as well mail, or?

A: Oh, no. You'd get a mail on Saturday morning.

Q: And I meant to ask you, too, what sort of wage you got when you were an apprentice.

A: 9 and 6 a week.

Q: What was your working week, Monday to Friday?

A: 48 hours a week.

Q: What time did you start in the morning?

A: I forget what time it was now. I think it was, I used to work 8 and 3/4 hours a day.

Q: How did you used to get there?

A: I used to go on the tram, and then I got a bike later on, and I went from a bike to a motor bike.

Q: What sort of motor bike did you have?

A: Well, I had two smaller ones that I bought, and then I bought a new one, an Indian Scout. I bought a sidecar when I got married and I used to take my wife in the sidecar. We had the sidecar with the kiddies in and she used to nurse one and have one sitting between her legs on a hassock. You know what a hassock is?

Q: No, what's that?

A: You don't know what a hassock is and I can't even see one, a round thing like this, only smaller.

Q: Oh, a little seat?

A: Like a little seat. Well one used to sit there and then we bought another one when we got Kevin, see, and the motor bike was overloaded then so I bought a car. I paid £25 for it.

Q: What sort of car was it?

A: A Chevrolet.

Q: Where did you get it from?

A: Broadmeadow.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p8.

- Q: What, a car yard--or?
- A: No, no, I bought it off a chap down there, £25. I had that for years. I used to do a lot of repairs and that myself to it.
- Q: Were there many petrol stations in the area? When did they start?
- A: Oh, not too many. Not too many, but there used to be different ones. Used to be one at Lambton, there was none at Jesmond here. Wallsend. One at Broadmeadow.
- Q: So in between Jesmond and Lambton was it mainly just bush?
- A: Oh yes.
- Q: And just the Tram-line in between, and what did the tram run on?
- A: Lines, the same as the trains.
- Q: So where was the Tram-line from here, from Jesmond to Lambton, was it straight up?
- A: Through the cutting. You know where the cutting is over there at the back of the (uh) only one street down from where you live
- Q: From Chilcott street?
- A: From Chilcott street, the next street down is Howe street, well that's Howe street, instead of turning to go to Wallsend, it used to go through they called the Cutting. It was a single line, down here where Woolworths is, at the back of Woolworths. Woolworths is built on a swamp, you know, down here. When we used to go down to catch the tram down there if it had been raining. We'd have to go round the road up what you call Blue Gum road and round the road to get on the tram. But if it was fine weather, well you could cut through where Woolworths is.
- A: Woolworths had a fair bit of trouble there when they built that place. They-
- Q: Just had to fill it all in?
- A: Oh yes and had to drain it all that over the place.
- Q: And what about Jesmond Park, that was swamp land too was it?
- A: No, its been there ever since I was a boy. I used to play football up and down there.
- Q: Was that ever fenced off as well for horses?
- A: No.
- Q: It was just open?
- A: Yes. Its a good sort of a park down there.
- Q: When you went into Newcastle what would be your reason for going in there--I mean your groceries would have been from the corner shop would it?
- A: Oh yes, at the corner shop, just at the shop just at the back of us here. Stevensons.
- Q: Stevensons, and the occasional rabbit. What butcher did you go to?
- A: The butcher from Wallsend used to come down here with his horse and cart. He only lives two doors up here now. He's about 79 or something now.
- Q: What was his name?
- A: Dave Arthur.
- Q: He used to bring the meat?
- A: Oh yes, he used to come around with all the meat on the cart.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p9.

- Q: And what about fruit and vegetables?
- A: Oh well, the fruit and vegetables used to come from Wallsend. A chap by the name of Smith from Wallsend used to come down.
- Q: How many times a week?
- A: Only once. Well we used to grow that much stuff of our own.
- Q: And so you'd only go to Newcastle for special occasions, would you?
- A: Oh yes, you wouldn't bother going into town really.
- Q: And what about the beach, did you go to the beach much in those days?
- A: Not very much. I learnt to swim there when I was going to school when I was 14. The baths were then, in those days when I was 14. They've been there a long time.
- Q: So did you learn on your own to swim or--?
- A: No I learnt to swim through the class at the school, in the holidays.
- Q: What sort of swimming gear/apparel did the boys wear?
- A: What--swimming tights? Oh yes, neck to knee--none of this trunks. (laughter)
- Q: Well, they had a good idea as far as skin cancer goes didn't they?
- A: Yes. (laughter)
- Q: Probably come back into fashion, I guess?
- A: Yes, that's right.
- Q: And what about the girls?
- A: The girls was the same, oh yes.
- Q: So when you were about, say, sixteen where did you used to go for entertainment--you know, if you wanted to go out and meet the girls or?
- A: Pictures at Wallsend. What they used to call Dad Phelans.
- Q: Dad Phelans?
- A: Picture show. And Young and Garrity built another picture show up before you go down over the lines, over the train lines, you know where you run down into Wallsend across the train line there? Well on your left there used to be a picture show there. Then there was another picture show started a bit further down where there's an Arcade down there, they knocked that down and put this Arcade in there.
- Q: So when did radio come along?
- A: Radio? Oh, it hasn't been going that very long, radio. I suppose if you went back 20-25 years that's about all.

O.F.C. History. Transcript of Tape. L. Dickinson. 1989. p10.

Lesley: Well I think I've asked you everything I wanted to ask. Is there anything you'd like to add to the tape, for posterity?

Stephen: I built this house in 6 weeks and it cost £500. In '31, work got scarce and I opened a repair shop in Lambton and I'm still there after 58 years in Lambton. 58 years last April. Then my son Kevin wanted to come in and work in the shop and I taught him the trade, the other two boys had left in that time. We had a big repair business in those days. We had more machinery in Newcastle in our shop than anybody in Newcastle had. We got stitching machines and cutting machines and everything over there. No need for them now. They don't make shoes like we used to make them, see, they wouldn't make a shoe like this. (taps shoe).

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. L. Dickinson. 1989. p1
The Life of Stephen Simpson and His Trade of Bootmaking.

Before the name Lambton was given to the area, it had been inhabited for thousands of years by people of the Awabakal group. Traces of their occupation of the land such as flake implements quickly disappeared under the houses and roads of the Europeans.1

The town was named Lambton after the family name of the Earl of Durham, an English coal owner. Originally called Dark Creek, Jesmond was re-named after the Tyneside town.2

From day one coal was the focus of economic and social growth in Lambton. Thomas Croudace, who was superintendent of the Scottish Australian Mining Company established the Lambton pit in 1862 in the area of the present day Lewis oval. Twentyeight huts were built around the pit on company

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. came from Britain,
The Life of Stephen Simpson the area of the original
And his Trade of Bootmaking in Lambton.

Lesley Dickinson. 1989. national, shops and services were required. Water was an infrequent commodity and in the 1870's people used to beg for water from the drivers of steam engines passing through on the way to the mine. Mr.Croudace, when asked for assistance agreed to allow two tanks of water to be placed at a siding.4 This was not always adequate for needs, in 1877 Dr. Hill complained that some of the water was no better than mud and that some cases of Typhoid had

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. L. Dickinson. 1989. p1

The Life of Stephen Simpson and His Trade of Bootmaking.

Lambton miners were prosperous, and a Sydney Morning Herald correspondent wrote that it was a land of "Goshen".⁶ Before the name Lambton was given to the area, it had been inhabited for thousands of years by people of the Awabakal group. Traces of their occupation of the land such as flake implements quickly disappeared under the houses and roads of the Europeans.¹

The town was named Lambton after the family name of the Earl of Durham, an English coal owner. Originally called Dark Creek, Jesmond was re-named after the Tyneside town.²

From day one coal was the focus of economic and social growth in Lambton. Thomas Croudace, who was superintendent of the Scottish Australian Mining Company established the Lambton pit in 1862 in the area of the present day Lewis oval. Twentyeight huts were built around the pit on company land. Some of the first settlers came from Britain, including the "geordies" from the area of the original Lambton.³

Once the pit was operational, shops and services were required. Water was an infrequent commodity and in the 1870's people used to beg for water from the drivers of steam engines passing through on the way to the mine. Mr.Croudace, when asked for assistance agreed to allow two tanks of water to be placed at a siding.⁴ This was not always adequate for needs, in 1877 Dr. Hill complained that some of the water was no better than mud and that some cases of Typhoid had

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. Lesley Dickinson 1989, p3.
O.F.C. Regional History Paper. Lesley Dickinson. 1989. p2.
of churches."11 holds the Bethel Independent chapel which was
resulted after the victims had drunken it.5

built in 1868 by seven miners after they had finished their
Lambton miners were prosperous, and a Sydney Morning
paid employment each day. A convent was opened in Lambton in
Herald correspondent wrote that it was a "land of Goshen..."6
1883 and the first sisters were from Singleton. Lambton
Some fine buildings were erected as a result of some of this
school was founded by a gentleman named Harris who rented the
wealth, the Mechanics and Miners institute in 1894, Lambton
Methodist chapel.12

Lodge which Thomas Croudace moved into in October 1863, and
The Police station was built in 1871, and had one
the Post office, built in 1886.

constable in attendance until 1879 when disturbances at the
There was a Fire station in de Vitre street, but after a
collieries forced an increase in number to two senior
hurricane took the top storey and deposited it into the
constables and eight constables. When the threat was
block next door, it had to be temporarily housed in a
considered to be over in 1881, it was policed by two men.13
large building belonging to a Mr. Hutton at the corner

The main street of Lambton is named after a director of
of de Vitre and Morehead streets.7

the Scottish Australian company, Mr. Elder. It is in this
Lambton Park was originally swamp land that many felt to
street that most of the traders are located. Family
be disease ridden and unhealthy. The Scottish Australian
businesses thrived in the early part of the century. The
company agreed to lease the land to the council, and the
Payne family have been butchers since 1870, when Arthur
company also helped with the reclamation. Money for the work
Lidney Payne opened a shop in New Lambton as well as Lambton.
was publicly raised together with some government money.
The shop situated today in Elder street is across the road
When the park was complete the government erected a rotunda
and opposite to the original one. Arthur was so successful
which cost 360 pounds. It was to be used as a speaking
he was able to build a big wooden house at the end of Elder
platform and as a band-stand.8 Memorial gates were added to
street with slates on the roof that were imported from Sweden
the park in later years. The pillars originally had a
and path tiles from Italy. It was a popular destination for
kangaroo on each one as evidenced in a photograph in 1915,
sightseers when out for a ride in their sulkies or buggies.14
but they have since disappeared.9

Above the shop awnings can be seen the original facade of
E. M. McEwen noted the "unique religious character of the
the Bell General and Drapery shop, built in 1901. George
colliery townships...",10 and Lambton was no exception to this
Bell, its founder, died in 1887 from injuries he received
observation. Dickson street, once known as "the street

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. Lesley Dickinson 1989. p3.
of churches."11 holds the Bethel Independent chapel which was
built in 1868 by seven miners after they had finished their
paid employment each day. A convent was opened in Lambton in
1883 and the first sisters were from Singleton. Lambton
school was founded by a gentleman named Harris who rented the
Methodist chapel.12

The Police station was built in 1871, and had one
constable in attendance until 1879 when disturbances at the
collieries forced an increase in number to two senior
constables and eight constables. When the threat was
considered to be over in 1881, it was policed by two men.13

The main street of Lambton is named after a director of
the Scottish Australian company, Mr. Elder. It is in this
street that most of the traders are located. Family
businesses thrived in the early part of the century. The
Payne family have been butchers since 1870, when Arthur
Lidney Payne opened a shop in New Lambton as well as Lambton.
The shop situated today in Elder street is across the road
and opposite to the original one. Arthur was so successful
he was able to build a big wooden house at the end of Elder
street with slates on the roof that were imported from Sweden
and path tiles from Italy. It was a popular destination for
sightseers when out for a ride in their sulkies or buggies.14

Above the shop awnings can be seen the original facade of
the Bell General and Drapery shop, built in 1901. George
Bell, its founder, died in 1887 from injuries he received

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. L. Dickinson. 1989. p4.
Lambton stays successful enough for shops such as Paynes
and Simpsons to keep thriving but not so successful that its
character falls victim to mindless development.
after being thrown from a buggy. The business survived for
many years. There were horse troughs at the back and a rope
and pulley was used to lift goods from the ground to the
first floor. The Bell family have since sold it to Alan Cody.

Simpsons family business has, like Paynes survived and
passed the test of time. This family has adapted to changing
trends and Mr. Simpson is most likely experiencing a boost
in his repair business in the present tight economic
atmosphere. At one stage the Simpson shop had more machinery
for shoe repair and production than any other shop in
Newcastle.

Mechanisation of the Shoe making process accelerated
in the first quarter of the twentieth century. By 1923
thirteen million pairs of boots and shoes were produced in
Melbourne and Sydney and major post-war advances in
technology increased production markedly. Even those
tradesmen who make surgical boots are losing work to the
advances in orthopaedic surgery.¹⁵

Lambton owes its existence to the rich coal seam
that used to run under it. Even its name is linked
intimately to coal. The New Lambton mine which Thomas
Croudace believed was usurped from him by the Brown
brothers¹⁶ led to New Lambton overtaking Lambton in
prosperity in later years. As a result New Lambton
has lost much of the charm of Lambton, having lost many
of its old buildings to " progress." It is to be hoped that

O.F.C. Regional History Paper. L. Dickinson. 1989. p6.

Lambton stays successful enough for shops such as Paynes and Simpsons to keep thriving but not so successful that its character falls victim to mindless development.

- 1 "N.S. 2.8.1974." Local History and Paper cuttings
Lambton area.
Lambton Library.
- 2 "N.M.H. 6.6.1950." Ibid.
- 3 "Newcastle Post.2.11.83" Ibid.
- 4 Glennie Jones. The Movement for Newcastle's
First Water Supply, 1875-1888.
Newcastle. 1967. p27.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 John Turner. Coal Mining in Newcastle.
1801-1900. Newcastle.1982. p93.
- 7 "N.H. 5.1.1986." Local History and Paper Cuttings.
- 8 "N.M.H. 1.12.1990." Ibid.
- 9 Negative number 3092. Photograph. Lambton, Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 10 Sheila Gras. Newcastle in the Great Depression.
Newcastle. 1989. p65.
- 11 "History of Streets" Lambton, Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 12 "N.S. 17.2.1954." Local History and Paper Cuttings.
- 13 No Page number. Lambton, Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 14 "N.S. 17.2.1954" Ibid.
- 15 The Australian Encyclopaedia.
Collectors Edition.
Terry Hills. 1988. Volume 3.
pp2834,2835.
- 16 John Turner. James and Alexander Brown
1843-1877. Newcastle. 1968. p36.

Bibliography.

- Docharty, J., Newcastle The making of an
Australian city. Sydney. 1983.
- Gray, S., Newcastle in the Great Depression.
Newcastle. 1989.
- Turner, J., Coal Mining in Newcastle
1801-1900. Newcastle. 1982.
- Turner, J., Manufacturing in Newcastle.
1801-1900.

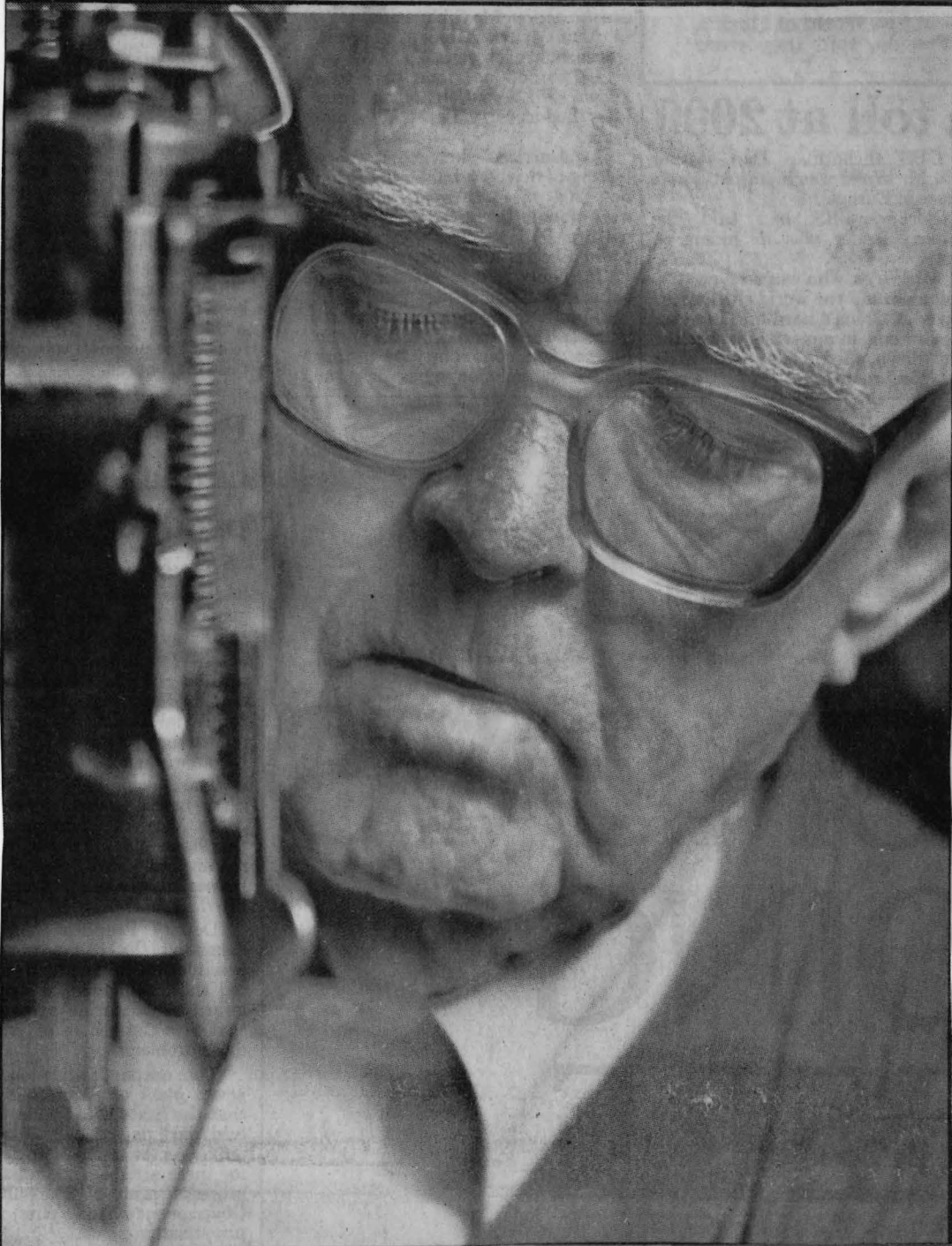
Footnotes.

- 1 " N.S. 7.8.1974." Local History and Paper cuttings relating to the Lambton area.
Lambton Library.
- 2 " N.M.H. 6.6.1950." Ibid.
- 3 " Newcastle Post.2.11.83" Ibid.
- 4 Glennie Jones. The Movement for Newcastle's First Water Supply. 1875-1885.
Newcastle. 1967. p27.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 John Turner. Coal Mining in Newcastle. 1801-1900. Newcastle.1982. p93.
- 7 " N.H. 5.1.1985." Local History and Paper Cuttings.
- 8 " N.M.H. 1.12.1890." Ibid.
- 9 Negative number 3092. Photograph. Lambton. Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 10 Sheilah Gray. Newcastle in the Great Depression.
Newcastle. 1989. p65.
- 11 " History of Streets" Lambton. Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 12 " N.S. 17.2.1954." Local History and Paper Cuttings.
- 13 No Page number. Lambton. Volume 3.
Regional Library.
- 14 " N.S. 17.2.1954" Ibid.
- 15 The Australian Encyclopaedia, Collectors Edition.
Terry Hills. 1988. Volume 8.
pp2834,2835.
- 16 John Turner. James and Alexander Brown 1843-1877. Newcastle. 1968. p36.

Bibliography.

- Docherty, J., Newcastle The making of an Australian city. Sydney, 1983.
- Gray, S., Newcastle in the Great Depression. Newcastle, 1989.
- Turner, J., Coal Mining in Newcastle 1801-1900. Newcastle, 1982.
- Turner, J., Manufacturing in Newcastle, 1801-1900.

Celebration for a sole survivor



Picture by PETER STOOP

Stephen Simpson at his shop yesterday . . . 'I think all the hard work has been good for me.'

STEPHEN Simpson says he could stitch shoes with his eyes shut.

The spritely 84-year-old, who has mended many thousands of shoes, will celebrate a remarkable 70 years as a bootmaker next month.

Mr Simpson was a lad of 14 when he began his career as an apprentice to Mr Ted Walton at New Lambton for 9s and 6d a week.

He completed the six-year apprenticeship and stayed on for another six years until the Depression made work scarce.

After being unemployed for three weeks, Mr Simpson started his own shoe-mending business in Morehead St, Lambton, in 1931.

In 1943 he moved the business to its present address in Elder St, Lambton, where he still works alongside his son, Kevin, and grandson, Craig.

These days most of the business involves selling new shoes, but Mr Simpson still works at his old Singer sewing machine and polisher four mornings a week.

'I don't know what I would do if I quit; I've always liked to be doing something,' Mr Simpson said yesterday.

'This is my trade. It keeps me going and keeps me in good health.'

Most afternoons, Mr Simpson plays bowls with his mates and elder brother Jack, 90, at Lambton Bowling Club.

Last month the club organised his longest holiday in 60 years: a three-week bus trip to the Northern Territory.

'We had a great time swimming in a billabong and flying in a helicopter over Ayers Rock,' he said.

Mr Simpson has lived on his own at Jesmond since his wife, Florence, died two years ago.

He has never been a drinker, except for the occasional scotch, and is proud of his fitness: 'I put in a fence post and a new gate on my property not long ago,' he said.

'I enjoy life and I enjoy the trade. I think all the hard work has been good for me.'

Celebration for a sole survivor



Picture by PETER STOOP

Stephen Simpson at his shop yesterday . . . 'I think all the hard work has been good for me.'

STEPHEN Simpson says he could stitch shoes with his eyes shut.

The spritely 84-year-old, who has mended many thousands of shoes, will celebrate a remarkable 70 years as a bootmaker next month.

Mr Simpson was a lad of 14 when he began his career as an apprentice to Mr Ted Walton at New Lambton for 9s and 6d a week.

He completed the six-year apprenticeship and stayed on for another six years until the Depression made work scarce.

After being unemployed for three weeks, Mr Simpson started his own shoe-mending business in Morehead St, Lambton, in 1931.

In 1943 he moved the business to its present address in Elder St, Lambton, where he still works alongside his son, Kevin, and grandson, Craig.

These days most of the business involves selling new shoes, but Mr Simpson still works at his old Singer sewing machine and polisher four mornings a week.

'I don't know what I would do if I quit; I've always liked to be doing something,' Mr Simpson said yesterday.

'This is my trade. It keeps me going and keeps me in good health.'

Most afternoons, Mr Simpson plays bowls with his mates and elder brother Jack, 90, at Lambton Bowling Club.

Last month the club organised his longest holiday in 60 years: a three-week bus trip to the Northern Territory.

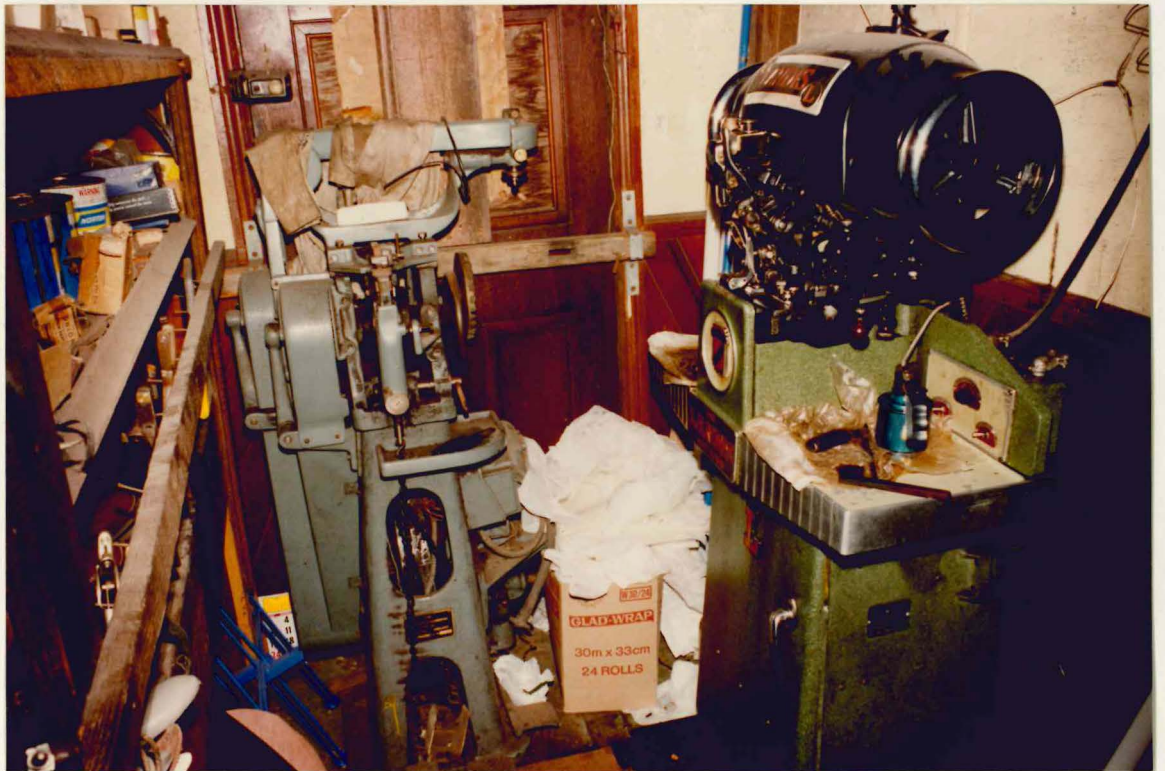
'We had a great time swimming in a billabong and flying in a helicopter over Ayers Rock,' he said.

Mr Simpson has lived on his own at Jesmond since his wife, Florence, died two years ago.

He has never been a drinker, except for the occasional scotch, and is proud of his fitness: 'I put in a fence post and a new gate on my property not long ago,' he said.

'I enjoy life and I enjoy the trade. I think all the hard work has been good for me.'

Machinery in Mr. Simpson's Workshop.

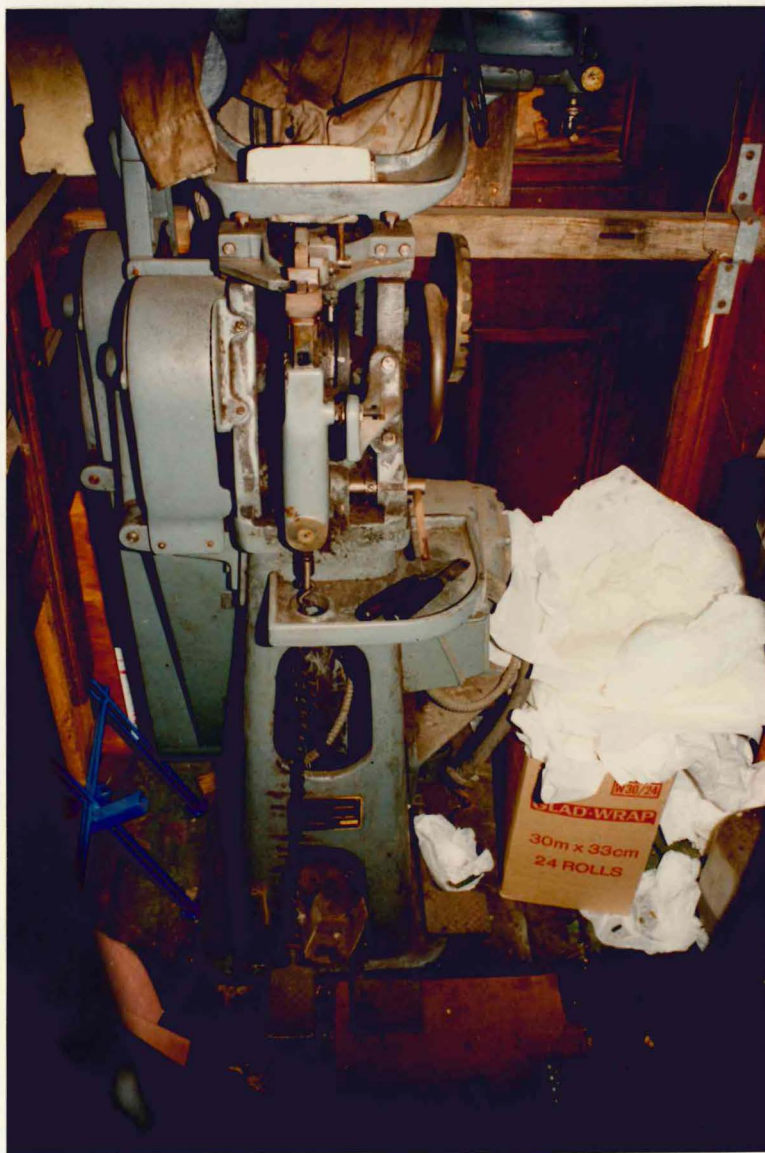


These pictures are
Of Mr.Simpson's
big stitching
machine.It uses
a thread called
7 dry which runs
through a pot of
hot wax before it
reaches the shoe.
He paid £700 for
it in Sydney, and
scarcely uses it
now.

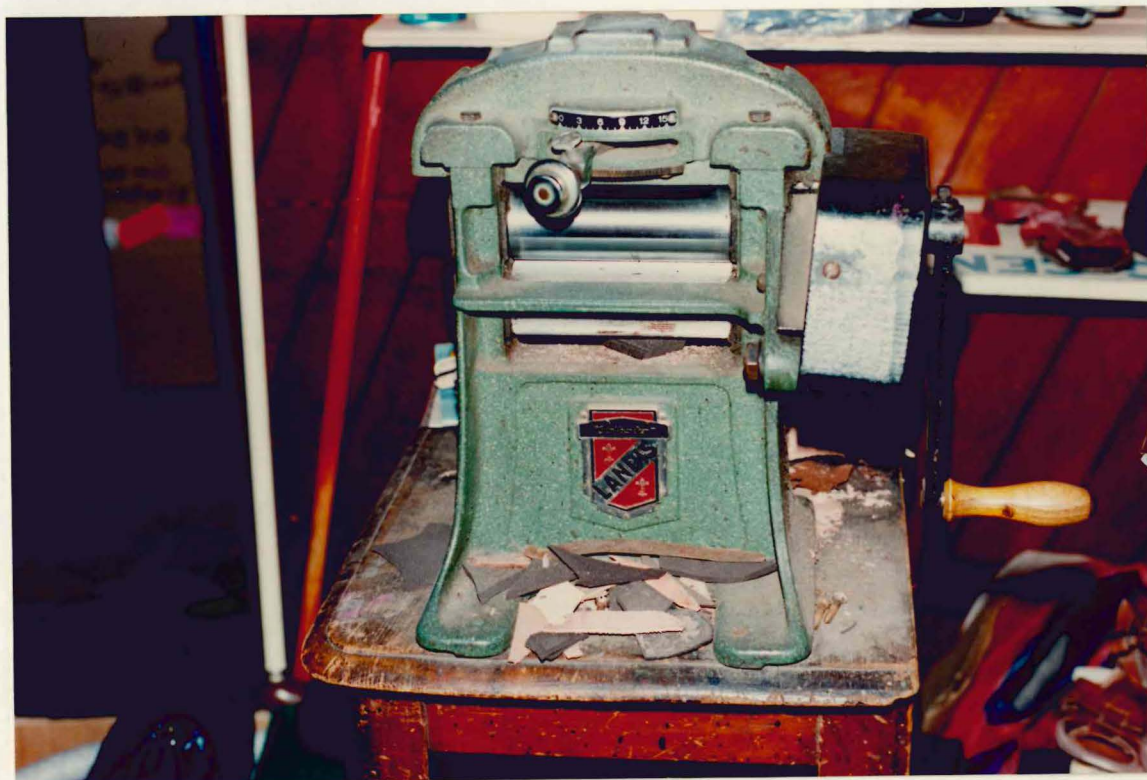


Triple action machine.

It cuts the sole, cuts the channel in the shoe while at the same time opening the channel.



Splitting machine. This machine shaves the leather if it is too thick. The layer thickness can be varied, so that it can be thin at one end and thick at the other.



Cutting machine, with 2 cutters and a skiver on it. The skiver trims around the finished shoe.



Singer stitching machine. It is invaluable for sewing patches on shoes as the arm allows the shoe to be fitted on easily for repair. Although uppers can be made by the bootmaker, they were made by tradesmen and were called "clickers". The bootmaker would send the lasts to the tradesman to make the clickers which would be made into shoes on their return.



O.F.C. Oral History. Stephen Simpson. L. Dickinson. 1989.

A metal last on its stand, there are also wooden lasts. Mr Simpson has a last that is the perfect dimension of his own foot, so his shoes fit literally, like gloves.



Finishing machine.

