

TRANSCRIPT

OPEN FOUNDATION COURSE

"HOW ONE MAN SURVIVED DURING THE DEPRESSION"

CLASS.....AUSTRALIAN HISTORY.

SUBJECT...REGIONAL HISTORY

LECTURER...MARGARET HENRY

CLASS.....THURS.10am - 12noon

NAME.....ENID ROSS

DATE DUE..11th AUGUST..EXT. ALLOWED

INTERVIEWER: I'm introducing Joe Chappell of Blackalls Park.

Joe at what age did you commence your working life?

INTERVIEWEE: I was working from when I was fourteen.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me of your experiences during the depression, where were you working?

INTERVIEWEE: All up around Gresford, in Gresford those days. I was fencing and rabbiting and all those sort of jobs. There was nothing else to do in them days, like you went rabbiting and when they was getting trapped down they'd give you a job fencing or bushwork, grubbing out trees and ringbarking and all those sort of jobs.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe were you working on the site?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes living on the site, oh a mile away.

INTERVIEWER: What was your habitation like, did you have a little house, did they provide you with a house?

INTERVIEWEE: Only a hut, pretty rough too it was, but, oh there was four or five around the district, shift from one to the other and all we had was two poles and two chaff bags put through them but they was quite comfy and a dirt floor. You could throw pumpkins between the cracks of the timber slabs.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe provisions, how did you get your provisions?

INTERVIEWEE: Five, six mile away was the nearest and I used to pick up the man on the cream run he'd take our orders and bring our provisions in and of course we had to walk down to where he used to pick his milk and cream up, to collect it I'd come around about a mile and a half. He always brought it out, we'd give him an order and he brought it out every second day, he'd come around and pick up the cream see.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe you did a variety of work, you said something previously about providing wood for the mines but the mines I suppose were not operating then were they? Were the mines operating?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes only in ^{Young} Wallsend. I was cutting timber for Borehole pit. In those days it was only three foot three high and I believe they've worked out into the country now it's about five feet but mostly all men that come from England they used to put them on at Borehill Pit because they was used to working low seams and the men that was used to working five foot seams they got a job there but it wouldn't be long before they can get out into a pit where it was five feet but Borehole had no trouble in getting men because those that come out from England they was used to working low seams and they knew they could get a job there anytime so they had no worries.

INTERVIEWER: And did you on occasions work in the mine during the Depression?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah I worked in West Wallsend, I was about sixteen I think and then I got a job, that closed down and I got a job in the Seaham No 1 colliery. I worked in that for a few years and then the Depression come on, it closed and I just went to the bush. I, down in Young Wallsend I was cutting props for Borehole pit and another place, Stocky I was cutting eighteen, that's Stockton, cutting eighteen foote for Pelaw Main, that was eighteen feet props.

INTERVIEWER: You said something to me earlier about having to take the bark off ----

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes we always had to bark them. All the big timber had to be barked. It had to be in a sense because some of the trees had fairly thick bark and it had to be three and a half inches at the thin end and if they'd leave the bark on you'd only have it like a sapling.

INTERVIEWER: And was there another reason for taking the bark off?

INTERVIEWEE: Well it's a lot cleaner and you could see, if the weight come on and if it was in a bad way with the weight and they start to bend ready to break and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't have any trouble with termites down there?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes they're there all the time. Not long, only a week or two you'd take green timber down and then you could hear them working in it. You wouldn't think five hundred feet underground and they must have come down in early days and they've come out in timber that's there and probably they could smell the green wood and it wouldn't be no more than a week and you could hear them chewing at it. You only had to look down around the bottom and you'd see all like powder where they used to bring all the boards out.

INTERVIEWER: So moving on to your occupation, your main occupation during the Depression would that have been out in the bush?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes that's all out in the bush. Cutting timber in the bush. Out at Stocky I cut props for Stocky pit and I cut them for Richmond Main and they were eighteen feet and the hardest part there was if a fire had been through the timber was knocking the bark off it, it used to stick, if it had been raining and good weather you could knock the bark off quite easy.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe apart from that you mentioned that you went rabbiting?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes as soon as things got slack I used to go straight away.

INTERVIEWER: And what methods did you employ in ----

INTERVIEWEE: Oh I trapped them and I poisoned, I used to poison them.

INTERVIEWER: What type of poison did you use?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh quince jam mainly, pound^{and}/a half tins, used to mix up one of those, we used to put a, known as the Bell's matchbox lids and what, about an eighth of an inch down from the top I'd fill it up with strychnine and then you'd mix all your jam up, give it a thorough mix up and then you'd take it out where your rabbits were, just dig a clod out of the ground and put oh about half a teaspoon.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe how would you go about deciding where to put these baits, I mean was there some indication in the ground?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: What indication did you have of ---

INTERVIEWEE: Good indication because rabbits always come up onto the ridges of a night time and they'd feed there and all the droppings would be about and you knew where the best place was to dig and a rabbit he likes to go into fresh ground that's been dug up. If you dig a clod up and he sees it he goes there to have a look. You mainly put your bait on top of it on the dirt side, just dig it up and turn it over and put about half a teaspoon on it and if your poison was too strong some of them would fall with their nose on the clod where they took it but generally runs around about fifteen yards and shorter than that and when you see them bleed at the nose you know the poison was too strong. You could buy a bottle of strychnine and some would be good and some perhaps it might go fifty yards away before it killed them.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe you trapped them as well did you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah we trapped.

INTERVIEWER: How many traps would you use, I mean how would you go about doing that?

INTERVIEWEE: I always worked sixty open setting, that's like just setting out but when I was trapping out the burrows never had under a hundred because some of the traps would be there for a week.

INTERVIEWER: And you'd set them near the burrows would you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah right in the mouth.

INTERVIEWER: Right in the mouth of the burrow?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. He had to come out his, the only time, what you call open setting you'd set it out on the ridge where they come out to feed and a rabbit is very inquisitive when he sees the new ground dug up he'll go there and smell sometimes and you'd catch him to the nose and other times you'd just catch him in the front legs.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe the rabbits you trapped did you sell those for meat or were you---

INTERVIEWEE: No I threw them away, skinned them and you'd be too far away to cart them I mean in a lot of the places you couldn't even get a vehicle in, it was too far.

INTERVIEWER: So you managed to get a good price for the skins did you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes we got, oh in the Depression we was getting three bob a pound for them and that was good money in the Depression. Roughly around about six to the pound. In the Depression three bob was three bob. Oh you'd have no trouble in getting ten bob a night, it depends on the paddocks you'd go into you see there'd be more in some paddocks than others. So I never starved, always had a few bob and when I got a few bob I used to go away fishing and then come back again, I used to spell the paddocks and then other fellows round about they'd be trapping and my country would be quiet and they'd drive out of one paddock into another.

INTERVIEWER: Joe was trapping rabbits a prevalent thing among the people in the Depression, I mean did a lot of men do this to supplement their income?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah a lot of men. A lot of men that could trap wouldn't trap they'd sooner starve and be looking out for handouts. I've seen fellows that could go out and make a decent living they wouldn't go out.

INTERVIEWER: And of course I suppose they were a plague were they, were they very troublesome?

INTERVIEWEE: Certain times, it was right back in the country where nobody goes and you get a good season and they'd breed up very quick but where you had a paddock that wasn't too big we'll say a couple of thousand acres, they never got a chance to get on plague proportion. But in plenty of places right back they couldn't get men to stop there. See it was thirty and forty mile out of town and you either had to make dampers or wait for the mailman, we got the mailman to bring us up bread, he only used to come up on the Saturday and go back Sunday. That's the only way, well it got that way at the finish we got him to take the skins into town and he had to bring a lorry at the finish, give him a good job.

INTERVIEWER: So that was quite an industry was it around Gresford?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh no this was out at main, Gloucester.

INTERVIEWER: Oh you were out at Gloucester with this lot?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah well I done a lot up around Gresford.

INTERVIEWER: And were there many men in Gresford doing this?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes there was quite a few.

INTERVIEWER: How many would you say?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh there'd be fifty or sixty men.

INTERVIEWER: Would there really.

INTERVIEWEE: Mainly men who'd had a lot of property of their own and it wasn't much for their cattle, they used to get about £8 for a beast and they used to thought that was good money but I've seen \$400.

INTERVIEWER: So you not only did this rabbiting in Gresford you did it in Patterson.

INTERVIEWEE: All up around Patterson.

INTERVIEWER: Patterson as well?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah up around Patterson.

INTERVIEWER: And would there be a large number of men rabbiting up there?

INTERVIEWEE: Eight or nine that would be around about like in an area because you wanted to have two or three thousand acres at least to keep you in a living.

INTERVIEWER: Joe what recreation did you have, you went fishing, tell me what else did you do, I mean did you have any other social life?

INTERVIEWEE: I used to be a rifle shooter, used to follow the sport up, mainly, oh West Wallsend they used to have a union shoot run at Adamstown in them days and they shifted from Adamstown up to Stockton and they're still using Stockton range. Every year they used to hold a big shoot down at, I just can't..

INTERVIEWER: Don't you worry about that.

INTERVIEWEE: Liverpool, Liverpool that was the main range, they used to come from all over the State to go there.

INTERVIEWER: So this was competitive shooting was it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: You did well at that did you?

INTERVIEWEE: I hardly went to a shoot unless I didn't get money out of it and I was pretty well up most times, around about second, third, something like that. Once or twice I got first. Once at Liverpool I got up second and there were quite a lot of shooters there at that one, you had to be pretty good to get up there. A lot of that early days too I was only learning, getting experience from other men. It takes a few years to get that settled, you don't learn it in four or five minutes.

INTERVIEWER: Joe did you have any female company ?

INTERVIEWEE: No never had any, never thought of it.

INTERVIEWER: So you tended to stay with the men?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Mainly have male interests.

INTERVIEWEE: Mainly, and a lot of the time in the bush I was on me own, a lot of the time. Only time when I'd see anybody I'd be coming in for me rations or taking skins away and things like that. Coming home was the only time but I never worried girls at all, never ever entered me mind. All we thought about was making money.

INTERVIEWER: Right and Joe you enjoyed the bush?

INTERVIEWEE: I enjoyed it.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me something about that, what about the animals and ---

INTERVIEWEE: Well you never get lonely. We used to shoot them early days and at the finish I wouldn't shoot them. I never used to shoot them I used to like to poke around and they got that used to me a lot of places I'd be three or four yards off them, they got to know me, see I wouldn't interfere with them. Foxes, I used to catch a lot of foxes, pups and things like that. I'd let them go, I wouldn't kill them and when they got older I'd catch them again and there'd be good money in them see but if you caught some of them and used to handle them pretty careful, grab the tail and I could get me hand up behind their neck so they couldn't bite me and I'd give them a bit of a pet up and put me foot on the spring and let them out they'd run four or five yards and stop and look back at you but when they think of it they were lucky then but when they got good and I trapped them I used to kill them and skin them see.

INTERVIEWER: Oh so you got money for the skins did you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah that's---

INTERVIEWER: What would they do with those?

INTERVIEWEE: Well that's what you see these women have around their necks today these fur coats and things like that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh I see, I didn't realise our foxes were used for that?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes, well we've got some good ones here. It depends on the country where you are, if you get up in high country out of Scone and them places where it gets very cold your skins are real good.

INTERVIEWER: So you'd find yourself up there too would you? Would you go hunting up there?

INTERVIEWEE: I went all over the State.

INTERVIEWER: Good Heavens, during the Depression were you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. I did a lot around Gloucester, a lot around Patterson and out at Gresford and up on the Barrington Tops.

INTERVIEWER: Joe did you encounter the Aborigines at all?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh over and in toward Queensland and I found them alright but a lot of people because they're abos they seem to have no time for them but you get in amongst them one hour and treat them as they got to be treated and they can't do enough for you. I've got nothing against any blacks.

INTERVIEWER: So you had a good relationship with them?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Did you learn anything from them, were they able to impart things about the bush?

INTERVIEWEE: A lot of little things you learn off them but things that come natural to you when you're in the bush. You learn the habits of everything and where they keep around and the best places to go and find them and all that. See the rabbit he likes to get around the creek banks and rivers and things like that, anywhere there's plenty of water but he likes to get up on top of the ridges of a night time and that's where you get your best skins like in the cold climates up on the ridges and you don't trap them too early in the winter you try to save them because as they get on towards mid winter their skins are a lot better and you get a better price for them but a lot of people you'd give them a skin and they might think it's real good and it's not as good as it looks and on the inside of the skin it's nearly the colour of your hand there on a good skin but when they're not good skins they've got a lot of black and brown spots on them and that's new fur coming in or old fur going out.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting.

INTERVIEWEE: And where it's clean like that it's good skin.

INTERVIEWER: Right it's reached its' maturity has it?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes and that is the best skin to tan. One that's fur's coming out or coming in, well ones that's coming out a lot of that will come out and it would be as bare as that, the fur would come out of it. So it's little things like that you've got to be careful, if you're saving skins to tan some skins knock themselves about and when you tan them that hair will just come out.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting.

INTERVIEWEE: Like if you bruise a thing that hair will come out.

INTERVIEWER: So you have to handle them very carefully and---

INTERVIEWEE: No if he gets caught and don't knock himself about and as in the middle of winter they're generally good skins but if you let them knock them about or had a dog, if he only bites him or mouths him while he's alive that hair will come out. Bruised you won't notice it but it will come out and leave a bare patch so if you see a skin with all good hair and a bare patch you know it's been bruised. There's a lot of things like that most people wouldn't know.

INTERVIEWER: And did you learn this by observation or ?

INTERVIEWEE: You learn it, when you're trapping for skins and you know where you set them and when you catch them and when you skin them and you know by the inside of the skin you don't take notice of the fur side, the inside of the skin and if it's good it's clean like that but if it's motley it's either new fur coming in or old fur going out and when they tan that skin that fur will have a little bare patch on the fur side.

INTERVIEWER: Joe would you as men trapping communicate information to one another or were you just a loner, were you just out there on your own?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh sometimes you wouldn't see anyone for weeks.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't pool your information or?

INTERVIEWEE: No you trapped and you used your own knowledge.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think you got this from your father or where did you get all this knowledge, because it's really good knowledge?

INTERVIEWEE: Through experience through trapping. See now if you trap along ridges most of your rabbits go up there of a night time but you get down in low country and river banks and that there'd be a lot of rabbits about and they're

living in burrows there them skins are not near as good as the ones on the hills, not near. We'll get some one day and I can explain it to you better.

INTERVIEWER: I'm just thinking to myself that you seem to have had a very lonely life out there in the bush and that you didn't---

INTERVIEWEE: It got lonely but you never noticed it. Never notice it.

INTERVIEWER: You didn't notice it of a night, what did you do of a nighttime, I mean---

INTERVIEWEE: Well see in them days when you were trapping out you'd go around the traps of a nighttime and you mightn't get back in until nine, ten o'clock and you'd go to sleep and you're up at daylight to go around them again see.

INTERVIEWER: And you didn't ever feel as though you were---

INTERVIEWEE: Frightened or anything?

INTERVIEWER: Not frightened but you didn't, you didn't feel the need of the company of other people?

INTERVIEWEE: Well you sort of got used to it, you sort of got used to it. When there was a lot of game they get that quiet, they say you're nuts when you're talking to yourself but I've talked to the game and around about and birds, anywhere when you're skinning rabbits they come all around and you can talk to them and they take notice of you but they keep you know a few feet away from you but they know that they're safe to a certain extent. Now a crow he won't come too close and yet I've had them come to the camp and made themselves at home and with soap, you generally used to put a stick in the ground or drive a peg in and they used to have fish tins you know to put your soap in, if you didn't put it away the crow would come and eat it.

INTERVIEWER: Would he really?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Joe I heard a story about tallow. Do you know anything about tallow in those days, they used tallow for the mines. Speaking of soap reminded me.

INTERVIEWEE: Well tallow that's what they use for the old miners, do you remember seeing little teapot lights they used to have.

INTERVIEWER: Right, for lights?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah they used to do tallow. It's only fat.

INTERVIEWER: I was told that one manufacturer made it so beautifully that people spread it on their bread.

INTERVIEWEE: You could but it depends on what beast you get it out of see.

INTERVIEWER: So that's what it was, it was really just fat was it?

INTERVIEWEE: It was only fat. You'd poison things. You'd poison them tonight and when you'd go around tomorrow you don't find them, go around the next day and you'd find them well that skin if he was cold you could skin him but if he was hot you couldn't touch him because the hair would all come out and those sort of things, you'd put ^{em} in a cool space and come back of a night time, late in the evening like and skin them. As far as the skin itself I wouldn't like to make a fur coat out of it because a lot of that hair would come out.

INTERVIEWER: Joe did you ever shoot any kangaroos, was there any market in those?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh yes I've shot them.

INTERVIEWER: During the Depression?

INTERVIEWEE: I've shot them in the Depression, I used to eat the hindquarters of them.

INTERVIEWER: Did you?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes kangaroos and wallaroos, wallabies.

INTERVIEWER: You examined the organs did you to make sure?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah but----

INTERVIEWER: Did you realise you had to examine the organs for---

INTERVIEWEE: Oh you couldn't help, some of them were full of worms, full, you wondered how they lived.

INTERVIEWER: And you wouldn't eat those would you?

INTERVIEWEE: No we was after skins see, and we always took the hindquarters out for your dog, feed your dog. Cut him off at the kidneys and you'd take it along then back for your dog at camp but I've had a lot of hindquarters. They're mostly clean but of a very dry time they're full of worms, you'd be surprised.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe did you eat the rabbits too, were they a supplement to your diet?

INTERVIEWEE: I've had them but I wouldn't eat them unless I got them myself. They get a hydatis and it will come on them anywhere in the body and a lump will come and I've done it not me but a lump will come on the body and when you trap them out for money well they used to poke a knife in there and let the hydatis out and then of course when you took

them to the works all they done was run their hand down their back like that to feel for lumps and if they didn't feel no lumps they'd just pass them. But most rabbits they'd get the hydatid down near the back passage and it's just like sago, you know when you see sago balls, little round balls and it's got a, it's just like when you pour hot water on the sago you see the little hard lump in the middle and other sides like a bit of jelly and that's how hydatid comes out but it mainly comes down in the bowels. If you was cleaning rabbits for the freezing works you got your rabbit, you killed him and put his two legs together in the sinews you just cut a hole in it and poked a foot through it and hang him over a clothesline like you had a wire with you and the first thing you do is hang it up there and he's got his insides and everything in and while he's warm you poke the knife right up in the hole of the throat, go in, touch the heart and you let him hang, the blood will all run out and your rabbit's nice and white and clean but if you don't bleed him he's got a red looking look about him.

INTERVIEWER: So you wouldn't eat one unless you bled it well.

INTERVIEWEE: You can bleed them well but when they go into the works and they skin them and they've never been properly bled he's got more like a red look about him than what he has clean white. If I get a rabbit and I get them and I bleed them and I skin them when they're cold they're not really white but they're a nice colour but when they've been eating, oh what do we call it, it's a weed anyhow, when he eats that he's got a purpley colour in the flesh, there's nothing wrong with it but it don't look very nice.

INTERVIEWER: So you wouldn't eat that, you were---

INTERVIEWEE: If you're ----

INTERVIEWER: ---a bit subjective about that were you?

INTERVIEWEE: No but if you take them to the works and they skin them and clean them they don't throw them out.

INTERVIEWER: They'd sell them all would they?

INTERVIEWEE: Yes but a lot of these, it would come up anywhere in them, inside I've seen them oh lumps like that inside bowels.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard of this.

INTERVIEWEE: And it's just like sago when you pour boiling water on it.

INTERVIEWER: Joe were rabbits a cheap food in the Depression, could you buy a rabbit very cheaply in the Depression?

INTERVIEWEE: You would get it reasonable, a shilling I suppose.

INTERVIEWER: That much would they?

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah well I used to, when I've been in the bush skinning for skins if I was too far away I just skinned them and threw the bodies away, good stuff. But if I was, knew I was coming home at the weekend in the winter time I'd save the last two nights but jingos sometimes you'd carry them three miles, see you couldn't do it every day.

INTERVIEWER: And the weather that would be so cold would it that that would----

INTERVIEWEE: Yeah oh you get them up there like around Gloucester and them Barrington Tops they'd freeze, I've seen----

INTERVIEWER: Right, so it would be like having an ice chest would it?

INTERVIEWEE: I've seen ice in them gullies been there all day and all week. You couldn't credit it, it was that cold it wouldn't melt.

INTERVIEWER: Right so you had no need of a freezer?

INTERVIEWEE: No no need but we didn't want the flesh we was only after skins see.

INTERVIEWER: Right but you did bring some back sometimes?

INTERVIEWEE: Oh I used to, if I was coming home I'd bring home all I could get.

INTERVIEWER: And Joe what would you do with those, would you sell them?

INTERVIEWEE: No I'd give them away. The only place was Merriwa we was trapping there, me and my father I was only I suppose about nine and you set your traps and you went out mainly burrows up there,

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1988

I, Joe Chappell give my
permission to Erica Ross

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Signed Joe Chappell

Date 3. 9. 88

Interviewer Erica Ross

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" HOW ONE MAN SURVIVED DURING THE DEPRESSION "

CLASS....AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

SUBJECT...REGIONAL HISTORY.

LECTURER...MARGARET HENRY.

CLASS....THURS. 10am - 12noon.

NAME... ENID ROSS.

DATE DUE....11th AUGUST... EXT. ALLOWED

Joe Chappell commenced his working life as a miner at West Wallsend. As he was born in 1907, he would have been aged 14yrs. When that mine closed, he obtained a job at Seaham No. I. Colliery where he remained until the Depression.

To use his own expression, he just " went to the bush ". Initially cutting timber for the Borehole pit and Pelaw Main colliery, this entailed debarking of logs to ensure that the thinnest end was at least 3½ins in diameter. Clean timber was easier to observe for warping as well as termites which were audibly active five hundred feet underground.

Eventually Joe established himself at Gresford where he found work. This involved fencing, grubbing timber and ringbarking ; however, his most consuming industry was to be the clearing of rabbits which were in pest proportions. The sale of these pelts provided him with a steady and reliable income throughout the Depression.

Joe's dwelling was a hut constructed of two poles which supported hessian over a mud floor and his companions were the animals and birds. Unthreatened, they gathered daily in close proximity. He unsmilingly though fondly describes " the small rabbits come right up while I am skinning the catch ".

Operating to a plan, the idea was to clear a property of between 2000 and 3000 acres. Two methods were used, poisoning and trapping. Poison consisted of 1½ tins of Quince jam mixed with a proportion of strychnine ¼ of an inch down from the top of a Bell's matchbox lid.

Rabbits like to gather on the high ridges at night, they are also attracted to disturbed ground ; therefore Joe would till the ground before placing small

spoons of poison over an area.

Trapping involved the placing of one hundred traps. These were usually positioned individually at the mouth of a burrow, although they were left at points following the study of the animals habits.

Collections were made each morning after a check of the working area. Pelts could not be removed when the carcasses were warm or hot as this caused loss of fur. Rough handling also resulted in loss due to bruising ; so transport to the campsite was a very careful operation.

Furs gathered from high ground were superior and more luxuriant but the test for grading purposes was carried out on the inside of the pelt. Those of a clear and pink colour were top grade and considered mature. Inside spotting or mottling of a pelt indicated either that the fur was coming in or falling out, in other words, it was either moulting or forming.

Pelts averaged 3/- a pound and there was no difficulty in earning 10/- per day.

Supplies came from the cream run contractor who also collected the pelts weekly.

Joe mentions that when he " had a few bob ", he would go away fishing ; his only other concession to social life was rifle shooting and, on occasions, he competed with interstate shooters at Liverpool. His main motivation was to win money and he was moderately successful.

Loneliness was not a problem. Joe appears to have been in harmony with the environment. Kangaroos, wallaroos, wallabies and foxes were also included in the hunt for pelts. Kangaroos provided meat for the dogs and the hind-quarter was valued as domestic food after careful inspection for parasites. Joe, however, would only eat rabbits which he had carefully examined and bled.

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Newcastle was founded upon the coal industry which had undergone a slow decline by 1921 when under 10% of males were employed in mining. 1.

Docherty suggests that this was due partly to the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 and the increasing use of petroleum as an energy source. 2. He also draws attention to the unending flow of men from northern N. S. W., who, in seeking work artificially swelled the statistics of Newcastle unemployed.

The majority of Novocastrians possessed only their ability to labour, opportunity for trades training and higher education came later. There was a shifting population of skilled workers who took up positions in heavy industry, particularly boilermakers. These men often overreached their ability to meet the transfer costs of families, thus contributing to factors of employment instability in the area. 3.

It was under these economic conditions that Joe Chappell entered the workforce in 1922, aged 14 years, as a miner at West Wallsend.

This was a caring community of strong, mainly religious high principled people, always willing to share among their neighbours. 4. " The name was borrowed by West Wallsend Mining Co, to create an impression on coal users because Newcastle and Wallsend Coal Co produced such a high quality product. " 5.

The eldest of Fred and Alice Chappell's seven children, Joe lived at nearby Holmesville, in a dwelling owned by his parents who could neither read nor write. His attendance at Barnsley school could not be confirmed ; the present secretary, Nolene Allen, was unable to trace the admission or attendance record. Although his level of literacy was poor, he was to develop into a very practical man.

Employment at West Wallsend was on an " offhand basis " but Joe was determined to acquire skills and when the mine closed he obtained work at Seaham No. 1 Colliery as a contract miner. Work proved to be intermittent over the next few years so, lacking full employment, Joe found his position untenable and made a decision to " go bush ". During interview , Joe refers to the 20's as the depression which is consistent with a report given by Sheila Gray of a newly arrived couple from Bristol who confused the recession with the depression which was to follow. 6.

Docherty describes the " economic dislocation throughout the Western World ". 7. Heavy industry developed to meet the needs of war , as well as the replacement of german industrialists who formerly supplied the domestic and heavy industry markets ; these stagnated and came to a halt as market gluts became apparent with the opening of steel works in France and Belgium with improved technology. This placed stress on local markets unable to compete with such efficiency.

Shipping was also affected to the disadvantage of the State Dockyard which struggled along with ferry contracts.

Industrialisation in Australia occurred during a period of inflation, with incomes relatively higher. Profits did not allow for the reinvestment of new plant necessary for industrial growth and competition with Europe. It was expedient to be cost effective by increased productivity but with less workers. The numbers were more than halved in 1921 and , by January 1922, even these were not fully employed because orders were not forthcoming. 8.

These conditions had their effect upon the coal industry already beset by the increased use of oil. The Department of Mines reported in 1921, that 2461 men worked an average of 171 days per year. 9.

Aside from interview, Joe described John Brown as a just man, well respected by miners and he had a deep understanding of the problems faced by industrialists. His recollections of hard decisions made by mine owners lacked any trace of bitterness. His attitude was that it was up to him to seek alternatives.

Initially , he was able to supply timber for the Borehole pit and Pelaw Main. This had to be carefully selected and debarked to allow 3/8ins at the thin end. Timber was observed for bending in the pits and the presence of termites were easier to detect at work on clear props.

Fencing, grubbing trees, and ringbarking, provided a steady flow of work in the country around Gresford and Gloucester. The isolation and beauty of the land was regarded as a bonus.

Linda Doherty wrote an article in the Newcastle Herald on the 6th of April, 1985 in which she submitted an excerpt from a letter writted to a relative in England by Dorothea Mackellar. It appears the poet grew up in Gresford and drew her inspiration for " My Country " from its beauty. 9A

A dwelling was constructed of two poles which

supported hessian over a mud floor. Whilst describing his hut, Joe's eyes became misty, particularly when he speaks of his companions, the animals and birds.

Sheila Gray refers to makeshift housing in Newcastle where homeless unemployed people were able to construct their shelters on areas of Crown land, many of which remained to the 1960's. IO.

The eviction riot at Tighes Hill in 1932 was an organised protest but it also emphasised the extent to which a normally orderly mass of people can be driven by such an affront to their dignity. II.

Far removed from such turbulence and insecurity, rabbiting was to become a consuming industry for Joe Chappell. This introduced animal was in pest-proportions in the Hunter region and landowners were generally pleased to have a person attack the problem with method and the serious intention to control their numbers. Joe recounts that many owners of Gresford properties who were also suffering the effects of the depression, were themselves engaged in this activity.

The effects of the depression on landowners is highlighted in an editorial in the Newcastle Herald in 1930. " On the Land " refers to the unfallowed land and fallowed land. The advantages of this practice is evident but the small increase in profit between 1925 - 26 and 1927 - 28 did not compensate for efforts expended. The article was an appeal for subsidy.

Two methods were employed in rabbiting, poisoning and trapping. As furs were superior in the higher and colder regions, these were the preferred areas for operation. Joe's attitude was, nevertheless, academic. He had a duty to clean the area, usually 3000 / 4000 acres and he worked relentlessly at the task.

Traps or poison were laid at night and a 100 traps took a long time to space , usually at the mouth of the burrow. Poisoning tended to concentrate on the ridges where droppings were evidenced. Rabbits are attracted to disturbed or tilled ground and this was prepared.

Collections were commenced early in the morning and carcasses were skinned when cold. Hairs fall from pelts removed from a warm or hot carcass. It was necessary to handle hot or warm rabbits carefully as bruising also causes the hair to fall out.

Joe claims that he had no difficulty earning 10/- a day from rabbit pelts when the basic wage was £4 per week. Combined with other work, he was able to make a good living whilst also improving natural and pastoral lands which would otherwise be devastated by this uncontrollable pest.

" Rabbits introduced into Australia In 1788 have turned areas of once productive land into desert or barren waste! I3. Penny Van Oosterzee, after completing a master ~~Environmental~~ Studies at Macquarie University, undertook contract work for the CSIRO and the Conservation Commission of the Northern Territory. I4.

Her study covered habitat, habits, breeding patterns and level of destruction to land, natural flora and fauna. The result has been uncontrollable breeding, both extinction and reduction of species of native animals and flora.

In dry seasons, vast areas are deprived of vegetation as rabbits consume roots and seeds to obtain moisture. Thus extinction replaces regeneration and erosion results as winds gouge the earth, no longer held together by root systems.

Joe Chappell used his initiative and resourcefulness to remain a well-adjusted person while so many waited for direction in an economy which had failed them.

This man finds practical solutions to many problems which frequently beset his neighbours. He has a sound knowledge of the natural environment, its flora and fauna. For many years he has carried out repairs on his own car and vehicles belonging to others. Engines hold no mysteries, Aged 81, he is to be found most days busy at work in his well-equipped garage or in his orchid or vegetable garden.

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