

ALBURY & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC BULLETIN

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MAY 2012

523

REPORT ON APRIL MEETING 18/4/2012

What was it you were wanting? Can we interest you in a bicycle, a case of 1875 champers, the where-with-all to deal with rabbits on a one by one basis, or on a mass extermination scale? Or, would you settle for an acetylene gas lighting system? We can do a good deal on an aeroplane. Or, perhaps you'd care for an X-ray while you are waiting?

All this was on show at the April Meeting of the Society. Thirty-six members and an equal number of guests crowded the meeting room at the Albury LibraryMuseum to hear a series of high class presentations on the theme "Amazing Stories: Innovation & Invention."

This special meeting, conducted in partnership with Albury City, was part of NSW Heritage Festival activities which had begun on Saturday 14 April with the launch of *Sharing the Bonegilla Story*. This catalogue companion to the Bonegilla Collection in the LibraryMuseum was prepared by Dr Bruce Pennay OAM.

Speakers on the night were Michael Browne, Marion Taylor, Bridget Guthrie, Eric Cossor, Chris McQuellin and Peter Whitbourn. All are to be congratulated on the obvious amount of research and preparation that went into the quality Power Point presentations.

Matching the presentations was the ingenuity and perseverance of the inventors and innovators of the Albury district in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who were the subject of the researchers.

NEXT MEETING

WEDNESDAY

9 MAY 2012

7.30pm at Commercial Club
Albury

Speakers: Faye Stevenson & Joe Wooding "Townsend's letters & maps; and Leah Warburton (AlburyCity arborist): "Hovell Tree clones."

AGM 13 June 2012

Nominations for office
bearers & committee close
21 May.

Nominations forms available
from Secretary

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ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION

Single: \$25

Family: \$33

Corporate: \$50

Research undertaken \$25 first hour.

Enquiries in writing with \$25

History Meetings: 2nd Wednesday
of the month 7.30pm at Commercial
Club Albury.

Committee meets 3rd Wednesday of
the month 5.15pm at Albury
LibraryMuseum.

A&DHS website:

www.alburyhistory.org.au

President Chris McQuellin welcomed our new patron, Councillor Patricia Gould OAM and the welcome was endorsed with acclamation by the members.

The staff of Albury LibraryMuseum, Carole Whitbourn and Bridget Guthrie added to the enjoyment of the evening with the provision of supper. This is no mean feat for seventy people.

ROBBINS & PORTER & THE ALBURY MONOPLANE

By Michael Browne

An advertisement in the *Border Morning Mail (BMM)* 5 July 1911 advised the local motoring public of the opening of an 'Up to date repair shop' operated by two experienced mechanics late of Dalgety's Motor Depot, Bourke Street Melbourne.

The enterprising proprietors, Azor Robbins, 25, and Alex Porter 21 had come to town believing there was an opening for their services in an expanding Albury township. With over 5,800 people and 1,100 residences, it was clearly attractive to the two young mechanics. They held agencies for Austin, Daimler & Standard motors, along with supplies of petrol, oil & lubricants.

At the Albury Show in September 1911 they exhibited a chassis of a 15hp Austin motor car from the UK, demonstrating the latest improvements including high road clearance for Australian conditions. By June 1912 they had moved into new purpose built premises on Kiewa Street, next to Crawford's Stables, in a building capable of housing 40 motor cars, "the largest in the Riverrina". This is now the site of the LibraryMuseum.

In November 1912 they advertised as being agents for Hupmobile cars. Advertisements ceased at the end of 1912. Perhaps the partners felt they were well enough known in the town and needed funds for another enterprise. Enter the monoplane.

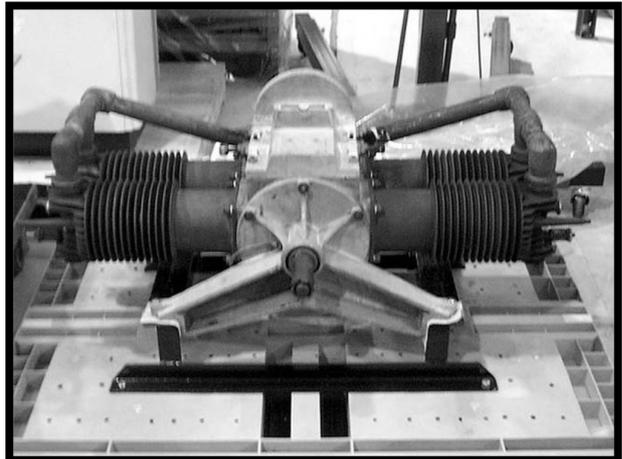
Since their coming to town the talented pair of mechanics had been working part time on an engine; this is not surprising knowing their trade, but this engine had far different origins. The engine had been ordered by Boer War veteran, Laurie Marshall of Fairfield, Melbourne who had been selected in 1909 as one of the final 21 entrants in the Australian Government's 5000 pound prize money for an Australian designed & built aircraft to achieve controlled powered flight over a specified distance. Aviation fever had hit down under and the government saw fit to encourage development in this ever advancing field. The world was an exciting place, for around the

same time Louis Bleriot had skipped across the English Channel in his monoplane and locally we had Harry Houdini performing death defying stunts at Diggers Rest in Melbourne.

Marshall had approached Aubrey Lock of the Herbert Thompson Steam Car Co and Azor Robbins of Dalgety Motor Depot to produce a 50 hp engine for his aircraft. Aubrey Lock was a 'bit of a lad' and it is reported in *The Argus*, c1903, that he was charged with driving a car at great speed, 18-19 miles per hour, over a city street. When questioned over the incident he stated that he was just letting off a bit of steam. The magistrate was not amused and found the charge proven.

This engine was a 4 cylinder air-cooled horizontal opposed design, similar to the VW beetle. At that time it was the first of its type in Australia, and at 50 hp the most powerful, that is of course if it could be got to run reliably and stay together.

The engine was not as successful as hoped and Marshall cancelled the order and purchased a JAP vee 4 engine from England. This left Lock & Robbins with an engine. What they needed was an aeroplane, so Robbins and Porter decided to



Four cylinder air-cooled horizontal opposed motor designed by Lock and Robbins and used to power the monoplane. Now in the Museum of Victoria.

build their own.

Construction began around Christmas 1912. Local hardwood timber was used for the open box-type frame with aeronautical fabric-covered wings and tailplane. The plane was set up high off the ground on a spindly undercarriage with motorcycle wheels to prevent the large propeller from connecting with the ground.

About 6 months later in May 1913, it was ready for trials and was reported in the *BMM* that they were practicing taxiing the monoplane most evenings on a property out at Bungowannah, west of Albury, which had a large open field protected from high winds.

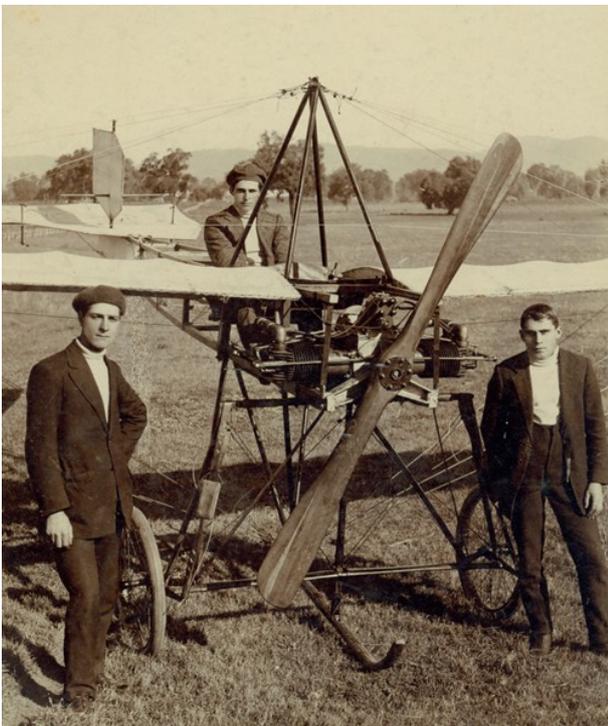
Alex Porter when asked the reasoning for the taxiing had replied. " We must first learn to run before we can fly. The only difficulty is keeping the monoplane on the ground. We do not feel efficient enough to chance rising."

The Albury Banner on Friday 1 August 1913 reported:

Messrs AD Robbins & AW Porter, two clever young Albury engineers, after spending seven months upon the planning and construction of a monoplane are now in a position to say that the machine yields every prospect of answering all requirements. ...

For experimental purposes the inventors took the monoplane to Mr Powers' Bungowannah property eight miles from Albury, and a clear stretch of country, about 700 yards long was chosen near the homestead. For some time the lifting of the machine was not attempted, but on Sunday, in the presence of half a dozen people, the air was taken to a height varying from 15 to 20 feet. It was not sought, owing to the limited space at command, to turn the machine in the air, but satisfactory straight flights were negotiated in every direction.

On Tuesday the experiment was repeated in the presence of a *Banner* representative and the machine took to the air gracefully. The trial, however, was interrupted by a mechanical defect, but the test demonstrated the capacity of the monoplane to take to the air after a ground run of about 200 yards. The inventors, who deserve to be rewarded for their patience and industry, intend exhibiting their machine at the coming Albury Show.



Posing with their monoplane, 27 July 1913; Azor Robbins left, Vivian Porter pilot, and Alex Porter right. Note the high undercarriage and safety bar to prevent the propeller striking the ground.

The witnesses are not named but from further research they have been identified as Azor Robbins & Alex Porter (the designers & builders), John Hunter (photographer), Rupert Johnson (apprentice mechanic to R&P), the *BMM* reporter & property workers all unknown. Rupe Johnson went on to be a well-know mechanic in Albury for many years.

Alex Porter's younger brother Vivian got to fly the plane owing to an apparent insurance restriction preventing Azor & Alex, both married, from engaging in foolhardy conduct, that is, flying.

What happened next is hazy. The business partners left the Albury area. They did not renew the lease on their premises in Kiewa Street. The building was sold to F C Blacklock, who in March 1914 was operating his business there.

The plane's engine was returned to Melbourne and was in the Armidale workshop of Aubrey Lock until his death in 1966. It was donated to the Museum of Victoria by a friend in 1978. This was fortuitous because what is now known to be the oldest horizontal air-cooled aircraft engine in Australia is still around over 100 years later. The design format itself is still used today in the majority of light aircraft such as the Cessna. The monoplane frame is thought to have been destroyed in a fire, but this is yet to be confirmed.

What became of the budding aeronauts? Azor Robbins left Albury and emigrated to the USA and was a successful engineer for the International Truck Co. He died in the 1940s. Alex Porter left Albury and by Christmas 1914 was sailing out of Port Phillip Bay bound for the Great War as a member of the AIF.

He was released in March 1917 in England to take a commission with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC), later to be called the RAF. He gained his pilot's licence in 1917, but was unable to join his squadron in France owing to ill health. Flying in open cockpit aircraft was hazardous to your life, not only from a stray piece of lead, but from the bitterly cold wind. He was honourably discharged and repatriated to Australia, and farmed at Sealake in Victoria until his death in 1921. Young Vivian Porter, the Albury pilot, also died young, in October 1914.

The £5000 prize money was never paid. John Duigan achieved controlled powered flight in a biplane aircraft which he and his brother built in 1910, but didn't claim the prize due to a misinterpretation of the rules. Laurie Marshall, the guy who ordered the engine, also achieved controlled powered flight in 1912 in his own

biplane. He claimed the prize, but it was decided that as there were no other competitors and therefore no competition, his claim was dismissed and he spent the next 12 years paying back the debts he had run up.

If anyone has any further information about surviving relatives of Aubrey Lock, Azor Robbins, Alex Porter, or Rupe Johnson, or any photographs or relics pertaining to this aircraft please see myself or a member of the A&DHS or LibraryMuseum staff.

My thanks to Albury LibraryMuseum, Border Mail and fellow members of the A&DHS for supplying information and aiding in this research.

THOMAS HENRY HICKS & THE POISON CART

By Marion Taylor

Thomas Austin had the dubious honour of having released the first large number of wild rabbits in Australia in 1859

at Barwon Park near Geelong. Austin was a successful pastoralist who stated at the time: "The introduction of a few rabbits could do little harm and might provide a touch of home, in addition to a spot of hunting!"

Thomas Henry Hicks' business hopped from hum-

ble beginnings at Bowna to become a large engineering works in Sydney. His humble blacksmith shop at Bowna had flourished because of the struggle to contain the devastating rabbit plague which threatened the Australian farming industry.

Thomas Henry Hicks was born at Chiltern to John and Mary Jane Hicks (nee Dunstan). They were migrants from Truro, Cornwall, where John was a stonemason. Thomas was the seventh of twelve children born between 1861 and 1886.

When Thomas was 17 he was apprenticed to Wain and Hyland, Blacksmiths at Chiltern. Thomas Wain, one of the partners had worked for Lampitt's foundry in Albury and made the spiked iron gates and fences at the Albury Courthouse, as well as the iron gates at Mate's store in Townsend Street. Wain and Hyland were well known as the prize-winning makers of ploughs and vineyard implements in the area.

Obviously Thomas had learnt his trade well at Wain & Hyland and saved his money because by 1895 he had finished his apprenticeship and

struck out on his own buying into a blacksmith shop at Bowna. At that time Bowna was a Cobb & Co stop with three pubs, so no doubt there was plenty of business although one writer of the time, W H Ferguson, was moved to comment that, "It was always blazing hot and dreadfully dirty, and if one rode through it he would not even know it had an inhabitant, the very dogs seemed too tired to bark". This was a little harsh as the early photos show some quite substantial buildings, though they might have all been pubs!

Blacksmiths in 1895 made ploughs, wheels, gate hinges, trap setters. They repaired all steel implements and of course shod horses. Thomas Hicks' claim to fame was the Poison Cart which revolutionised the destruction of rabbits.

Following Mr Austin's release of 24 rabbits, 5 hares, 72 partridges and some sparrows near Geelong, the rabbits spread faster than any other known introduced species in the world. Enjoying



Thomas Hicks' blacksmith shop at Bowna in 1895. In the centre foreground is a poison cart under construction. It is thought Thomas Hicks is the man in waistcoat and apron standing on the left.

Australia's mild climate they reproduced so rapidly that by 1926 it was estimated there was 10 billion rabbits in Australia and in 1944, 104 million rabbit skins and carcasses were exported.

On the positive side there was a large industry as-

sociated with the rabbit and many families may have starved during the depression without them but on the negative side they caused millions of dollars damage in lost pasture for livestock, destroyed native vegetation and caused soil erosion. Traditional methods of control included trapping, ferreting, digging, fencing, shooting and poisoning.

Poisoning was slow and could be dangerous but around 1895 there were several inventions made which distributed poisoned pollard by various methods. These usually fitted onto an existing vehicle such as a dray.

Thomas Hicks revolutionised this idea by building a purpose built light cart which effectively laid a trail of pelletised poisoned bait. The operator would mix pollard, sometimes bran and treacle, oil of aniseed for flavour and then added phosphorous, strychnine or arsenic. This concoction was called "rabbit jam".

Rabbit poisoning in the Table Top District was said to have wiped out the native population of kangaroo rats and bandicoots. The use of phosphorus as the active poison was also extremely

dangerous in hot weather as any undissolved or unmixed chemical could spontaneously ignite.

The Hicks poison cart used a tyne or mould-board to cut a small furrow, the depth of which could be altered, disturbing the soil, which attracted the rabbits but covering the poisoned bait when it was laid making it a little less accessible to birds and other animals.

In 1901 Mr Hicks corresponded with the Patents Office about his developments of poisoned pollard machines and in 1902 his patent was registered for improvements in machines for distributing doughy or pasty material. By 1904 he was advertising his "Pom-Pom" Pollard Distributor, possibly taking the name from the "Pom-Pom" machine gun used in the Boer War 1899-1902, so called because of the sound it made.

By 1905, he had expanded his business to High Street, Botany while still operating out of Bowna. Apparently he took 14 workers from Bowna to Sydney to work in the new business including his brother Charles. In 1917 his son-in-law William Digby started working for him and stayed for 20 years.

In 1906, the first advertisement for the Ideal Poison Cart appeared, listing many prizes won at Agricultural Shows. Mr Hicks advertised extensively throughout NSW and Queensland during these early years. From all reports his Poison Cart was extremely popular and used in many areas.

Hicks had many competitors in the rabbit control industry, so he expanded his range of products. By 1910 he had invented bushfire fighting carts and was making oil engine carriages, scoops and fumigators.

By the mid 1920s Thomas Hicks had a large General Engineering Works in Botany which made tar boilers, concrete carts, road rollers, street watering carts, tanks, steel chimneys, wrought iron wheels, wool dryers and tanning machines. Bowna township by this time was being inundated by Lake Hume.

I have found no record of when the business ceased, but in 1926 there was a presentation dinner in Mr Hicks' honour, where he was given an illuminated address and a gavel and trowel.

He served as mayor of Mascot for four years and was an alderman for 15 years.

Thomas was also vice-president of the Royal South Sydney Hospital.

He died in 1951 at the age of 78 while living at *Truro*, 8 Patterson Street, Double Bay.

I salute Thomas Henry Hicks who came from humble beginnings to be a resourceful inventor, successful businessman and a supporter of his community.

FREDERICK CHARLES BLACKLOCK & A SNAPSHOT OF EARLY CYCLING HISTORY IN ALBURY

By Peter Whitbourn

Frederick Charles Blacklock, born 1871, became involved with building cycles around the year 1892. At first with James Scanlan and later in 1899 with Alfred E. Fuller.

Fred was certainly a visionary, inventor and innovator, a man ahead of his time. One could say an entrepreneur with a finger or more in a number of enterprises. He was quite athletic, a footballer and bike rider and I wonder if his first bike was a penny farthing. I am going to speak about one small segment: his early involvement with cycling.

If we begin about 1892 it appears that James Scanlan began a cycle business in Kiewa St Albury which became Albury Cycle Agency. This was long before the motorcar, so bicycles were becoming the means of transport, and they were affordable for many people. The safety bike, as it was called, with pump up tyres was a new concept; remember the penny farthing was coming to the end of its production with its solid rubber tyres.

The Albury Bicycle Club was formed and the first Great Bicycle Carnival was held at the show-grounds on Easter Monday 1893, 119 years ago.



Albury Bicycle Club c. 1899. Riders in black jerseys with 'Swift' monogram are Fred Blacklock, James Scanlan and Alfred Fuller.

The bicycle club conducted many road races and Fred Blacklock's name is shown among the list of riders and by 1894 both he and Scanlan had ridden to Melbourne together. Later that year Scanlan was elected as treasurer of the Bike Club. According to newspaper reports of the day both Scanlan and Blacklock were given handicaps in later road races.

In the same year Fred C. Blacklock purchased the Robin Hood Hair-dressing Saloon obviously as an investment.

Fred and James built a tandem bike intending to try their luck on a 25 mile road race, but sadly their second hand front tyre blew out.



**Relay cycle of the type ridden by Matt Chapple
winner of the Intercolonial Dunlop Road Race,
Warrnambool to Melbourne 1902**

There is a great photo of a group of men in front of James Scanlan's Albury Cycle Agency. This shows a fantastic line up of bikes and trikes and gentlemen in bowler hats in the year 1896.

There is another photo of Albury Cycle club men which includes Fred Blacklock, James Scanlan and Alfred Fuller. Alfred we will learn more about a little later.

James Scanlan displayed a number of imported bikes at the Albury Show in 1897. In 1898 the Show report indicates that Blacklock had been added to the business name so we then had the business name Scanlan and Blacklock. They exhibited their first locally built machine which had been christened the "Scanlan-Blacklock". In that same year, 1898, Scanlan and Blacklock had entertained the public at the Easter bike carnival, riding a tall bike called the Eiffel Tower. This was a 2 wheeled bike described as belonging to the local entrepreneur Fred Blacklock.

The Swift cycle with Dunlop tyres was also an imported bike and Scanlan and Blacklock were the Albury agents in 1899.

At the Albury Show that year they displayed their 50th locally manufactured bike. This was now called the Relay bicycle.

Apparently Alfred Fuller had some record race performances on a Relay bike and that bike was on display at the show. There was also a Relay bike with a second top bar.

In 1899, from the newspaper records, we learned that James Scanlan had left for the Boer War and Fred Blacklock had taken over the business with Alfred Fuller.

We understand that Fred Cossor and Paddy E. Mangan also joined the firm around that time. By show time 1900, the trading name had become "Blacklock and Fuller" and the Hume cycle was added to the Relay; also a ladies Relay was being manufactured. The 100th Relay was on display and was then donated to the Albury hospital and

Newtown Orphanage for disposal to raise funds.

The next phase in growth of the business came in 1902 with the first motorized bicycle. This was achieved by bolting on to the frame of a Relay bike a Minerva engine that Fred imported from Amiens in France. These were 1½ BHP, and in time larger capacity engines were used. In 1902 a gun repairing branch was added to the business. We need to realize that the bearings, cranks and axles for bicycle building were imported from BSA (Birmingham Small Arms) in the UK. As their name suggests they also supplied gun, rifle and pistol parts.

Also at the show in 1902 was the famous Relay record breaking bike that had won the Intercolonial Dunlop Road Race, from Warrnambool to Melbourne. This bike was ridden by Matt Chapple, an employee of Blacklock and Fuller.

In 1903 another cycle was added to the local production, called the Cameo.

By now the business had extensive premises which included their own gas enamelling oven, brazing room, 2 workshops with brazing hearths, gas forges and all the latest tools, lathe, screwing machines and special vices.

Fred could rightly boast that all repairs and servicing of all kinds are promptly and skilfully done. The quote from the newspaper reads, "As the firm imports all their own requirements patrons can rely on getting everything of the best, at below city prices, and be treated fairly and honestly".

SAM COSSOR

By Eric Cossor

"If an invention is not simple it is not an invention"

Sam Cossor

Sam Cossor was born in Albury in 1888, lived most of his life in the town till his death in 1984 aged 97. His earliest recorded invention was in 1914 when this report appeared in the newspaper of 1 July of that year.

NEW ACETYLENE GAS GENERATOR

A representative of *The Border Morning Mail* was shown a new patent safety lighting machine styled the "Lexemall" gas generator, invented by Mr Sam Cossor, a very promising young inventor of this town. He is the son of Mr W J Cossor, engine driver at Messrs J. Burrows and Co Pty Ltd flour mills, Albury. Mr Cossor explained the working of the machine at his house in Young Street and lighted it up for our benefit. We can say that of the many machines of the kind in use it is far and away the best that has ever come under our notice. It gives a beautiful white and steady light, and is so simple a child can work it. Mr Cossor assures us that it is perfectly safe. The carbide and gas chambers, being wholly immersed in water, makes it impossible for the gas to be accidentally ignited. The members of the 6th Bri-

gade Field Artillery's Sergeants Mess used one of Mr Cossor's machines at their last Easter camp in Sydney, with perfect success. Mr Cossor is to be complimented for having produced such a machine, and we wish him every success with his invention.

Unfortunately for Sam, electricity was rendering acetylene gas lamps obsolete and Sam's invention with them.

World War I intervened shortly after and Sam joined the Merchant Navy. He was drafted to the Armed Merchantman *Copenhagen* in Sydney and sailed to Britain. He wrote about the voyage:

I boarded ship in Sydney headed for Glasgow with 10,000 tons of wheat aboard. When we headed around the cape to the Atlantic Sea there were deck chairs and corpses floating in the water we could not stop as we were not allowed to take on corpses.

Heading for Glasgow we spotted a periscope near us, the chief officer signalled to drop depth charges. Bubbles came up and we knew we had hit it because we arrived in Glasgow safely

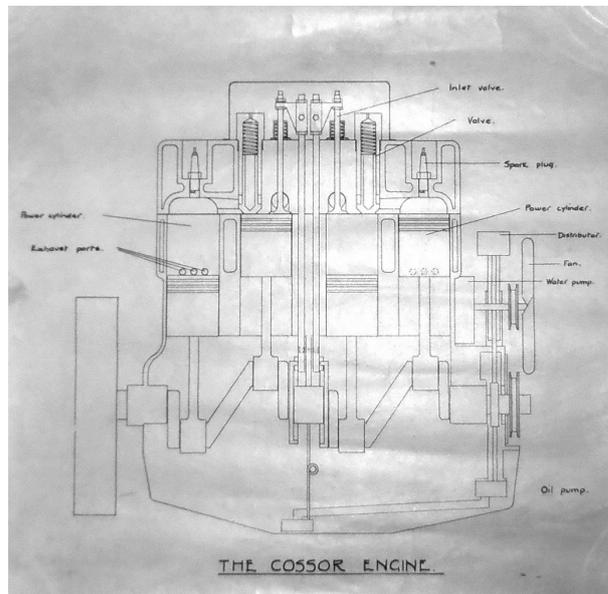
I was not in the navy very long, I worked for Dunlop Tyre Works after that I was manufacturing Bristol Fighter Planes.

While in England Sam met his wife Annie and they both returned to Australia. He started several businesses in Albury. One of his workshops was on the site where the LibraryMuseum stands today and another one was in Smollett Street close to Farmers & Graziers wool store [Tax Office]. He continued to come up with ideas.

Around 1930, he invented a hold fast gadget which he patented in Australia and the U.S. It operated on a simple leverage system principle so that when attached to a crane or overhead rafters it would hold materials such as fibrous plaster sheets, hides, and masonry. He sold 4000 of them and it was probably his most successful invention in terms of getting some return from it.

Then along came WWII. Sam's willingness to put his inventive talents at the service of the war effort is documented in the National Archives. His ideas included: a device to wreck tanks, a canister design, a mine to wreck submarines, a parachute bomb with wire connections, a system for aiming and discharging torpedoes, a spring gun, a submarine detection device and an armour-piercing projectile. He didn't ever find out if any of them were used, but he said they didn't bring him any rewards.

In the 1950s Sam started work on a rotary petrol engine which he believed would make the piston engine obsolete. He knew that a rotary engine had been designed in Germany, but he claimed his design would be more efficient, smoother and would be an improvement on the other one. He wrote to an English motor company about his new motor and was told it would be considered when patented.



Sam also had going at the same time, a new two stroke motor system that he had adapted to an old Fiat engine and it worked. His four cylinder two stroke motor with 15 moving parts would provide the same power as a four stroke motor with 34 moving parts.

Sam also invented a self sealing piston ring that he put into his own car and he claimed they worked well too. However I have been told that his son-in-law Fred Hayes put them in his car and they weren't all that successful and Fred wasn't happy.

Sam's inventiveness was never ending. In his cupboard in the 1960s, was a device which would enable a service station attendant to blow up a tyre to a pre-determined pressure and when the pressure was reached the air flow would stop and a whistle would blow. The cupboard also contained an ingenious pair of tweezers operated by a button and designed for tasks such as extracting grass seeds from otherwise inaccessible places in the noses and throats of humans and dogs.

I personally had to seek Sam's services in his capacity as a gunsmith. I had borrowed a little Bully single shot .22 calibre rifle from a friend and I left the breach open and lost the ejector. It is a little half moon thing on a stem that flicks the empty shell out when you pull the bolt back. Anyway I took it up to Sam and told him who I was and he very quickly told me no special deals just because I was a relation. He made a replacement part for it and it worked and the owner of the rifle was none the wiser.

Just one last story: the Post Office clock had not been working for a few days, so Sam went into the the Post Office and asked would they like him to have a look at it. They said OK, so up he went. He came back down about 15 minutes later and said, "I will be back tomorrow." He came back

the next day and got the clock going again in a fairly short time.

Sam commented a little sadly, to a *BMM* reporter, "I should have been a millionaire; my inventions have never managed to click."

JAMES THOMAS FALLON MAKING THE FIRST CHAMPAGNE

By Bridget Guthrie

The first vigneron John P Frauenfelder, Sebastian Schubach and Henry Rau arrived in Albury in 1851. They established vineyards in what is now central Albury. A larger scale development was undertaken by a joint stock company Murray Valley Vineyard Association in 1860. It was successful in obtaining 640 acres at East Lavington and work began on preparing the ground and planting vines.

James Fallon and his brother Patrick Edwin Fallon arrived in Albury about 1853 and established a general store in Kiewa Street south of Dean Street. In 1867, J T Fallon bought the Murray Valley Vineyard from the Association which had failed financially. At the same time he purchased land at 550 Kiewa Street and built a store with a substantial cellar for the storage and sale of wine.

J T Fallon, with his brother, travelled to Europe in 1872-3 and while in Paris he met with French vigneron François Gaston Léonce Frère. Fallon persuaded Frère to come to Australia for the purpose of making champagne.

Frère arrived in January 1875 and began immediately, laying down 800 dozen bottles. The normal time for the production of champagne is two years but by November of 1875, Fallon could wait no longer.

He invited local residents and visitors from as far away as Bathurst and Maitland to attend his Kiewa Street cellars to taste the new product. The results were good. JT Fallon declared himself sufficiently pleased that he proposed to lay down a commercial quantity of 2000 dozen bottles from the next vintage.

This he did, but in January 1876 it was clear the experiment was a disaster. Summer temperatures in the Albury cellars could not match the 10°C needed for champagne which was easily achieved in France. The higher temperature caused an increase in carbonic acid gas and the subsequent bursting of the imported bottles which had been made for French conditions. The innovation was a failure.

There is a suggestion that Frère made the first champagne in 1876 at St Hilaire Vineyard from grapes grown at Murray Valley Vineyards. This is unlikely because the land on which St Hilaire was established was not purchased till 1876 and no cellars or fermentation house had been built.



J T Fallon store & cellars at 550 Kiewa Street where the tasting of the first champagne made in Australia took place 23 November 1875.

Photograph *Vanishing Albury*, Howard C Jones and Bruce Pennay, 2000

J T Fallon was an inventor and innovator who pursued his passion doing something that had not been done in Australia. He was recognised as the producer of the first champagne in Australia in *Australian Dictionary of Dates and Men of the Times*, by J Heaton 1879.

Incidentally, the monks of the Abbey at Saint Hilaire in south-western France are credited with making the first sparkling white wine in 1531, long before it was produced in the Champagne region. François Frère's mother was from Saint Hilaire, hence the name of his vineyard at Thurgoona. [Ed note]

NOTE: Chris McQuellin's presentation on Drs Woods and Kennedy, James Scanlan and W Watson's use of X-rays in Albury will be included in Bulletin 524.

NEW BOOKLET

The Society has just published No 17 in its series of Occasional Papers. A considerable time ago we agreed to find personal details of nearly sixty early committee members of what is now the Albury Show Society. Some research was done several years ago and in the last months Jan Hunter and Helen Livsey have put in hours of effort to finalise the task.

A copy of *Albury Show Society Biographies of Committee Members 1901 & 1918* will be in the local history section of the Albury Library/Museum shortly. The booklet includes a history of the first fifty years of the Society written by Dr A Andrews, a general history and a short piece on the Albury Sheep Shows.

CHANGE OF ROOM AT COMMERCIAL CLUB

The Elizabeth Room at the Commercial Club where we have met for several years is no longer available owing to building alteration work. Members should consult the electronic board in the foyer on the night, or ask the steward for direction to the room where our meeting is to be held.