

I Remember [NMH, 11 December 1971]

I remember the Newcastle of World War 1, when I played truant for a fortnight from Wickham school, before being sent to Mittagong reformatory. In those days, schooling took up too many precious hours.

Despite the accompanying sharks, a swim across Throsby creek to Armstrong and Royce's sawmill was certainly more enjoyable than doing sums. At the Bank Corner, you could sneak into "Jummer" Edwards' Imperial Stadium and stand in the ring where Les Darcy had fought; this reminded me that I never sold as many papers as on the afternoon I shouted frantically, "Death of Les Darcy!" from Pogonoski's "Argus".

You could pinch carrots from the forbidding Chinese market gardens occupying the old racecourse, or you could walk up to Wood's Castlemaine Brewery and spend hours watching the coopers making their casks at the spot where the Store's parking station now stands.

And in Hunter St. West a boy was sure to see Alfie "Six-Toes" West, who had walked in barefooted from Lambton, and little Herbie Lowe, dashing along Hunter St. faster than any other walker in the world.

An empty lemonade bottle entitled you to a free billy-can of soft drink at Healy Brothers' factory. Then a boy could hop on the back of a horse-drawn lorry taking coke to the steam trams at Zara St., hoping that no one would scream out, "Whip behind!" to the driver.

On such a trip I passed sailing ships and weirdly camouflaged steamers, and the paddle steamer "Gwydir" that I had once gone to Sydney on. Black Harris was standing as usual on the corner of Bolton St. and once again I wondered why he didn't shanghai my teacher.

One day I saw a crowd gathered around a dapper little man who turned out to be Albert Shanahan, who had ridden two Melbourne Cup winners in succession.

One morning I saw "the richest man in the world", John Brown, very straight and severe, with a bowler hat, and I thought of my mate's father who was building polished maple fowl houses at Minmi for John Brown's imported Rhode Island Reds that cost £300 (\$600) each, and who had pinched three of the precious eggs and was now looking for a broody hen to hatch them out and thus make his fortune.

In town, the Victoria Theatre had posters for "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "East Lynne".

But a train must have just come in that day, for along the main street now came a stream of what looked like nigger minstrels, still stooping under their pit caps and lamps, and with their crib tins and water tins strapped on their backs.

Charlie's Letters 11 December 1971

So it was half-past three. I knew then that the matinee of "Tarzan and the Apes", featuring Elmo Lincoln, at the Lyric, would have to keep to some other day.