

INTERVIEW - MR. MAL. MOONEY, 7 ARMADALE STREET, THORNBURY, 3071.

Q. Would you like to start talking to me about the days of the Depression and how you come about to do that?

A. I left home when I was 16 because there were a lot of younger ones in the house and there wasn't enough food for them. I was stopping home then, unemployed, I couldn't get the dole.

Q. Were you living in Northcote then?

A. No, I was in Brunswick and, we first went rabbit trapping and the best you could get for rabbits sold in the country to the buyers was fivepence a pair for the best quality big rabbits, and twopence a pair for the bruised and small; and, there was a lot of hard work for very little return.

If you travelled around and hawked them around the country towns, you could usually get a shilling a pair for them. quality, equivalent to ten cents, and we had a horse and a bit of a rough turnout. A couple of us went and we used to dig out a number of dogs and we found we were getting thinner and more tired that way, and decided to go bush, dump our traps and things that we had and we carried the swag on the itinerant track rations which was 50 cents you could get a week, but you got it only in tickets and, (frequently) you weren't supposed to be able to buy tobacco or anything with it. It was much easier to carry tobacco and tobacco was harder to get than food was so, although the traders weren't supposed to supply you with tobacco, they'd say alright, they'd give you probably 40 cents worth of tobacco for a 50 cents ticket.

Q. So, if you spent your ration on tobacco, what money would you have to spend on food?

A. You survive out of food, you'd beg for it. Do little jobs. See, sometimes, oh various places you could get work at and sometimes like, we did a little while on spud digging; we'd dig potatoes - they finally they'd cut the prices down of what you could get and you could get ninepence a bag and you had to sew your own bag, you know. Normally, beforehand, it was a shilling a bag, and the farmers that were doing it in a big way, they made sure that they dragged you down to the last penny anyway. Well then sometimes you could get a job as a chaff cutter or a thrashing machine, various things; you often did little jobs around the town, like the blacksmith would get you to make a fire to cut and chop the wheels, the rims of the wheels, you'd often get a few bob for that; or we'd go and ask people for something and say you'd do something for it, like chop wood - some of them would get you to chop wood, others wouldn't.

Q. How did you travel from one country town to another - and which country towns did you go to?

A. I've been to a number. The Gippsland one was the favourite one that I'd done and been to the same places around to Bairnsdale - I'd walk to Bairnsdale.

Q. Where from?

A. Maffra, from Melbourne. Maffra was a town where if you got there at the peak topping you had a bit of a chance of getting a job, and you'd cut the beet they were growing there. They'd plough it, and you'd cut the tops off the beet and throw the beet into heaps and - the wages were never good at any of those things. You know, sometimes a farmer might give you a little bit of a job on the way cutting thistles and fern. We even got a few bob for helping him milk out and one of the family had been sick he said, and come round to - can you milk? We said, oh yes, we can milk - and we'd probably work that night, well then, sometimes the farmer would say well you can get a job here for three bob a week and your keep. Of course that was starvation food I suppose.

Q. They didn't feed you very well?

A. Oh some, the wealthy you got less from. The others, the average person's, they're human beings, they were in the same boat, a lot of them. A lot of the farmers in that area were walking off their land, they couldn't pay their overheads.

Q. Did you come back to Northcote then - I'd like a little bit of the Northcote history. When did you finish up?

A. Well, I didn't come to Northcote until the start of the second World War. And this is the only place that I've lived in in Northcote. Mainly, most of the life I've been around either Preston, Northcote and Brunswick. I was born in Brunswick - not a mile and a half from here, in Davey Street, Brunswick.

Q. And how long were you actually on the road like that?

A. Sometimes for three months, four months at a time. I was never on it consistently.

Q. You'd come back home in between, would you?

A. Not so much home, I'd go to other places and, well, I wasn't that often back home. I came back home a couple of times.

Q. ?

A. only one million people here when I came - there are nearly three now aren't there?

Q. In Northcote, yes?

A. Oh no, not in Northcote no. In Melbourne, yes.

Q. But you would notice a big difference in the areas around here?

A.small building, along Victoria Road was paddocks.
..... close the shop down there.

(Mal.) There was quite a number of rides, I didn't actually take part in them - I didn't get to Mildura, but frequently there was trouble with police at Mildura and usually provoked by the police. I think Frank Youlin and his book - ah, ~~Keth Moon~~ deals a fair bit with the carrying the swag - you were mainly with carrying the swag - with the provocation of the police - the place was like Mildura where they sent young police up deliberately to cause trouble and belt people up. Quite a number of the ~~blokes~~ that were even employing the labour were very hostile on the police for causing the trouble. Although, when a number of young people get together and probably get a few bob and a bit of plonk about, well, there's all sorts of things happen that need some policing. But, I mean, oh, deliberate bashing of unemployed workers was part and parcel of the time.

KEEP MOVING!
Blokes