

Con Keegan – The Mallee Lineman - Profile

Con first joined WoSP in the early days when the Club was located by the Council Offices. He left the Club in 2014 re-joining two years later. He was the one who introduced John Bayliss to the Club in 2004. He started out doing turning on Tuesdays (bowls, pens) then progressed to furniture in the form of a coffee table (with help from Bert Bartlett) plus a variety of clocks. He never bothered with selling his masterpieces – but they did make great gifts. He was surprised recently to see, at a local market, a price tag of \$95.00 on a pen with no special features. Now Con is coming to the workshop on Wednesdays helping out with toy making.



Some time ago, Con turned a bowl out of Huon Pine. This was definitely not given away. However, recently when he took it from its place in a cupboard, he dropped it with unpleasant results – a large chip from one side. It's now a case of how best to repair the bowl.

Con, the youngest of six children, was born in Sea Lake in 1943 and lived in nearby Woomelang till he was 18. Leaving school when he was 14, Con worked on farms for a while before joining the Post Office. At 18, he was transferred to Swan Hill where he worked as a Postman for some 12 months. This was in the days of the Post Master General (PMG) department – a government monopoly responsible for both postal and telegraph services. This allowed him to transfer to the telephone side of the Department where he became a lineman for the next 36 odd years. In those days, rural telephone lines were all 'open wire' (the ones that can be seen in old photos) running beside roads with each phone connection having its own pair of wires.

Woomelang, in those days, was a thriving country town – several shops, hotel, sporting clubs (football, cricket, tennis, etc) and a reasonable number of residents. However, like many of those smaller country towns, time has taken its toll and Woomelang's population has dwindled to around 200. Recently, someone is trying to reopen one of the hotels. The wheat silos were a great place to hunt pigeons – not that Con caught too many. What to do with a pigeon? "Take it home and cook 'em.". The silos in town have missed out on the latest painting craze - it's the paddock silos that have been painted around Woomelang. Con's last remaining sibling, a sister, lives in Geelong.

So, what generated the need for linemen? Basically, new connections, frosts and trucks - and there was plenty of the latter two. The frosts cooled the wires which contracted as they cooled. If there was insufficient slack in the wire, it contracted (length wise) till it broke. Trucks passing under the wires would not always be low enough in which case the wires were taken out. House removals figured in these incidents. When the wires were down, someone was without a phone line and did not hold back calling for a fix.

While stationed in Swan Hill, Con played football (AFL that is) and cricket for the local team. He also did some fishing but unlike some of his work mates, Con wasn't that keen. A fellow employee at Swan Hill was a chap by the name of Teddy Bourke. He and Con were working on a line between Underbool and Walpeup. It was stinking hot and the heat got to Teddy. Con drove three miles to a farm but they refused to give him any water. So Con drove him to Underbool to a hotel - they said 'Bring him in' and they filled him full of water. Teddy reckoned that this was the only time he'd ever been to a hotel and didn't have a beer.

After some ten years in Swan Hill, Con was transferred to Telecom in Melbourne where, after a course at Fisherman's Bend, he became a cable joiner working around the eastern suburbs (Camberwell District) - Tally Ho in East Burwood, Camberwell, Richmond, etc. Some of these cables were big – two thousand pair of wires which would take a day or more to do one join. It was while working in Melbourne that Con met and married Julian, a Melbourne girl. At this time, Con was living in Dandenong.

Con was then transferred (promoted) back to the country – to Stawell and working in places around the Wimmera – Nhill, Border Town, Kaniva, etc. One major job involved dismantled the wires between Kaniva and Border Town – a job taking several months – after cables had already been laid. Resulted in semi-trailer loads of copper being sent off to Port Kembla. Con was often away from home weeks at a time. Generally, Con's team was looked after well by the employer with stays in hotels, etc – and the occasional caravan park or whatever. After some 5 years, he was transferred to Rosebud. This required a commute to Melbourne resulting in Con leaving Telecom and taking a job with the Shire.

His experiences with the Mornington Peninsula Shire were varied – from grave digging (pick and shovel work) to driving a street sweeper. His work was eventually sub-contracted but the contractor 'went broke'. So, after 3 years or so, Con 'retired'. Con moved to a retirement village some time ago and shares his 'trade time' between WoSP and the village workshop.

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