

Chris Bird



It is with great sorrow that we note the passing of Chris, long time resident and friend of so many of us. The words of those who eulogised him at his funeral, held at his St Johns on April 12, provide a fitting tribute to this man who was held in warm regard by all who knew him.

Janice Hope, Chris' niece, wonderfully summarised the span of Chris' life;

Harry and Mabel Bird had an eventful day on 16th May 1928. Firstly, there was the birth of their first child, Chris, at Nurse Parker's Private Hospital in Lithgow. It was also Mabel's birthday and her sister in Queensland gave birth to her first son, Alf on the same day. Harry was walking up Main Street later in the day and people were stopping him and congratulating him. He assumed they had heard of Chris' birth, but no, it was because there was an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, the Melbourne Age and the Canberra Times announcing that a case of his prize winning apples had been presented to King George V at Buckingham Palace.

Chris lived his whole life at "The Range", Hartley Vale. He only had one sister, my mum, Mary, and they were always very close and great mates.

Chris and Mary did their primary schooling at Hartley Vale School, initially walking the two and a half miles each way. Eventually, Chris had a bicycle and doubled Mary to school until she received her bike. Their teacher was Mr Collett, whom they thought the world of.

During the war years they attended Lithgow High School, when it was in Mort Street. Together with their friend Ron Gurney they rode the eight miles each way. Of course, this included going up and down The Gap and there were no gears on bikes back then. If they were lucky and the timing was right, the Facchina boys or Angelo Butta would give them a lift home. They were the last to ride to school, as shortly after a bus run commenced.

There have been quite a few changes over the years on "The Range". In the early days, as well as the orchards, which had a variety of apples, Harry had a market garden producing cabbages, maize, tomatoes and peas. They were also commercial egg producers. Harry used to run a delivery service of his produce and Mabel's preserves to Lithgow each Saturday in the old 1928 Chev Ute. Of course, Chris accompanied him. When Chris was old enough to gain his drivers licence, it was no drama, as the policeman had seen him driving the ute around doing deliveries often enough before then.

Once Chris left school, he worked full time on the family farm. However, there was still time for socialising. Tennis was popular, as was attending the dances in Lithgow. He also, in his teens, became an active member of the Hartley Bush Fire Brigade, and later the Show Society, as well always attending church, here at Hartley.

Chris took on added responsibilities in his mid twenties, when Harry died suddenly. After then, Chris and Mabel continued to farm as a great team. One of Chris' great achievements was to fulfil Mabel's dream of a new home in her latter years.

Time moved on and the orchards no longer exist in the valley. Chris then became a familiar figure keeping the valley tidy with his tractor and slasher. And, of course, for many years Pam has been working alongside him and been a great friend to him.

Chris was a wonderful uncle and Godfather to Trevor and I. We always looked forward to our time spent at "The Range". Many school holidays were spent helping to pick and pack apples, move mobs of sheep, draft sheep and

feed poddy lambs, as well as collecting the eggs for Grandma. Looking back, I don't know how much "help" we were, but Uncle Chris always included us and was always patient. He would get out and kick a ball around and have a hit of tennis with us as well.

In more recent times, we always enjoyed sitting and listening to his yarns of the goings on in the Valley and the people that live here. He was a friend to so many.

Mum came across the following text that was read at Harry's funeral, held here at St John's back in 1953. It applies equally to Chris : "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold." Proverbs Chapter 22, Verse 1. Chris was a kind man and a good man. He will be missed by many.

Friend and neighbour David Peters went on to further reflect on Chris' active life in our community;

Hartley Progress Association presents an award for Community Service – The Spirit of Hartley. Chris was that Spirit of Hartley. Service to the community was his life and the community was his family. It wasn't a proper event unless Chris was there. His commitment was life long as was his membership of Hartley Bush Fire Brigade, Hartley Progress Association, Lithgow Show Society, The National Party, St Johns Church Hartley, Hartley Fruit Growers Association, the list goes on. Last month he clocked up 60 years of hard work for the Lithgow Show, much of it as Chief Pavilion Steward and Senior Vice President. Had he been here, in June he would have been presented with an award from the Rural Fire Service for 70 years service. For many years he was the Senior Deputy Captain of Hartley. He held the position of President of Hartley Progress Association and was awarded the actual Spirit of Hartley award. Last year he was presented with a National Party service award for 40 years. He took very seriously the membership of every organisation he belonged to, not being content with occasional involvement but preferred to play a major role in most community events. It won't seem right to hold a Federal, State or Council election without Chris handing out "How to Votes" at the Vale of Clwydd Hall.

Chris's passing was the end of an era for Hartley Vale. He was the last of his generation who were born and raised here, who heard all the stories from this valley back to the 1800's and in his way was happy to pass them on. Most of us have heard stories told by Chris and while yes we did often hear the same one more than once, even three weeks ago he told me one I hadn't heard before. To my knowledge he never embellished a story nor could they be considered as gossip, just reflections of happenings in and around Hartley.

My families association with Chris began when in 1952 when Dad bought the block of ground that separated the two Chris held. Neighbours became good friends. Throughout the years the friendship continued through to my generation, enduring broken fences, escaping stock and all the things farming neighbours often fall out over. Machinery and equipment was often borrowed either way with the occasional malfunction being repaired without re-percussions.

If I were asked to come up with a statement that defined Chris it would be:

" He always looked for the good in people".

Friend and fellow member of the congregation of St Johns Hartley, Carol Crossman said;

Chris has told me of being baptized here at St John's, and as his birthday was soon to be in May, I would think that was nearly eighty-five years ago. He had memories of coming to Church by horse and cart. Records given to me by Chris prior to the Sesquicentenary of St John's, show that he was elected to the position of Warden at the Vestry meeting of 2nd May, 1965. At the February Vestry meeting this year Chris was elected to be a member of a newly formed Committee. He was quite delighted with that position.

People here may recall the Hartley Happening of 2004, in which Chris, Olga Martin, Ian Campbell and Doreen Peters related stories of growing up in Hartley. Chris was eager to contribute as always, telling stories of Rev Dorph for whom he held great admiration and respect.

I guess most of you here would recall Chris' greeting "How are ya" and "Did I ever tell you about": and then relate a story of Hartley of long ago. His recall was remarkable, his wry sense of humour delightful and his love of Hartley, its people, its history and any planned events, equal to none.

On any occasion when St John's was open for inspection Chris would willingly spend hours relating stories to visitors. His welcoming smile and cheery greeting did much to welcome people to St John's and the Hartley community in general. He gave generously to causes such as The Cancer Council Morning Tea and to support St John's, always quietly, refusing recognition for the donations.

In the later years of Olga Martin's life, Chris would bring her to Church. Always the gentleman, Chris would remove his tool box and put a bag over the seat of his old ute for Olga's comfort. They would arrive in good humour and in the enjoyment of each other's company.

Chris gave of his time willingly, would never ask for help, but if it was given would be touchingly grateful.

Chris worshipped at St John's and contributed to the Fellowship over the eighty four years of his life. His significant presence will be sadly missed; however we will treasure the legacy he has left with lasting love and admiration.