



Oral History Program

A Vital Link

THE EUSTON TO ROBINVALE MURRAY RIVER CROSSING



A Vital Link – The Euston to Robinvale Murray River Crossing

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Introduction

In 2004, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority in conjunction with VicRoads began construction of a new bridge to replace the ageing bridge structure on the Murray River between Robinvale (Victoria) and Euston (New South Wales). The crossing is crucial to the interaction of the two communities and is also an essential connection to the regional centre in Mildura. Its construction involved the complete removal of the old crossing and the only part of the old structure which now survives is the lift span, which has been erected in a nearby park in Robinvale as a permanent historical display.

This book and oral history CD, to commemorate the opening of the new bridge, were commissioned by the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority to complement the extensive written history of the crossing and the towns and districts that surround it.

Fifteen local residents and the Project Manager of the new crossing were interviewed on digital audio tape to compile this book and accompanying Compilation CD. In the process, more than 14 hours of oral history recordings were recorded in 2004 and 2007. Copies of these tapes and/or transcripts will be deposited in local shire council libraries, the State Libraries of NSW and Victoria, the Euston-Robinvale Historical Society and in RTA and VicRoads archives.

Excerpts of interviews in this document have been edited for easier comprehension. References and sources of information, plus the oral history Compilation CD, are included at the end of this book.

The author would like to thank all who participated in this project – the interviewees and the people of Robinvale and Euston for their generous and invaluable assistance. It should be emphasized that the comments made by interviewees in this project are those made by the participants themselves and do not necessarily reflect in whole or in part the position of the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority and VicRoads.

Euston

When squatters in search of grazing lands moved south-west from Sydney in the 1830s, they came upon a marvellous body of wide water - the Murray River. The newly discovered waterway had been named by the explorer Charles Sturt, whom Governor Darling had sent out in 1829 with a party of seven men to trace the Murrumbidgee River to its mouth. Sturt and his men rowed an astonishing 1500 miles, half of it against a strong current, to achieve this feat. On 13th January 1830 they reached the junction where the Murrumbidgee met 'a broad and noble river' which Sturt named after Sir George Murray, then Secretary of State for the colonies. Governor Darling considered Sturt to have made one of the most important discoveries in the Colony. Sturt honoured the man who sent him by naming the Darling River after him.¹

The European discovery of the Murray discounted theories that because all the rivers in New South Wales flowed inland from the Great Dividing Range, they must drain into an inland sea.

The river was already home to a number of indigenous tribes, among them the Latji Latji and Wadi Wadi people who hunted and fished in bark canoes on the banks of the river and had done so for countless generations – perhaps 40,000 years. Evidence suggests that there was an abundance of food sources. Darcy Pettit is a local indigenous person who grew up along the river:

'There were plenty of crays in the Murray River - the river was a major source of food. We always had crays during the winter, fish during the summer, mussels, birds, possums, rabbits. The old rabbit, one of the greatest tucker that ever was born in this country, was the greatest thing the white man ever brought here as far as the Aboriginal people were concerned. It helped a lot of families through the Depression. Then I got into the snails and the grubs and the bush tucker, like the plant life and the sap trees, and the bark and honey and the bugs that make the honey that sticks under your foot when you walk through the bush – that was my life source,'²

In 1846 Edward Morey, then only 17 and accompanied by an indigenous guide, a dray and a few sheep and cattle tracked down the lower Murrumbidgee and settled at Boomiaricool, now known as Euston, named after a stately old mansion in England that belonged to the Earl of Grafton. This was in the heady days of squatters and overlanders, surveyors and prospectors. Morey's Euston run comprised nearly two million acres.³ As early as 1835, squatting had been recognised and 'Occupation Licences' were granted at an annual fee of 50 shillings per 1,000 sheep. A 'run' was supposed to carry 4,000 sheep.⁴

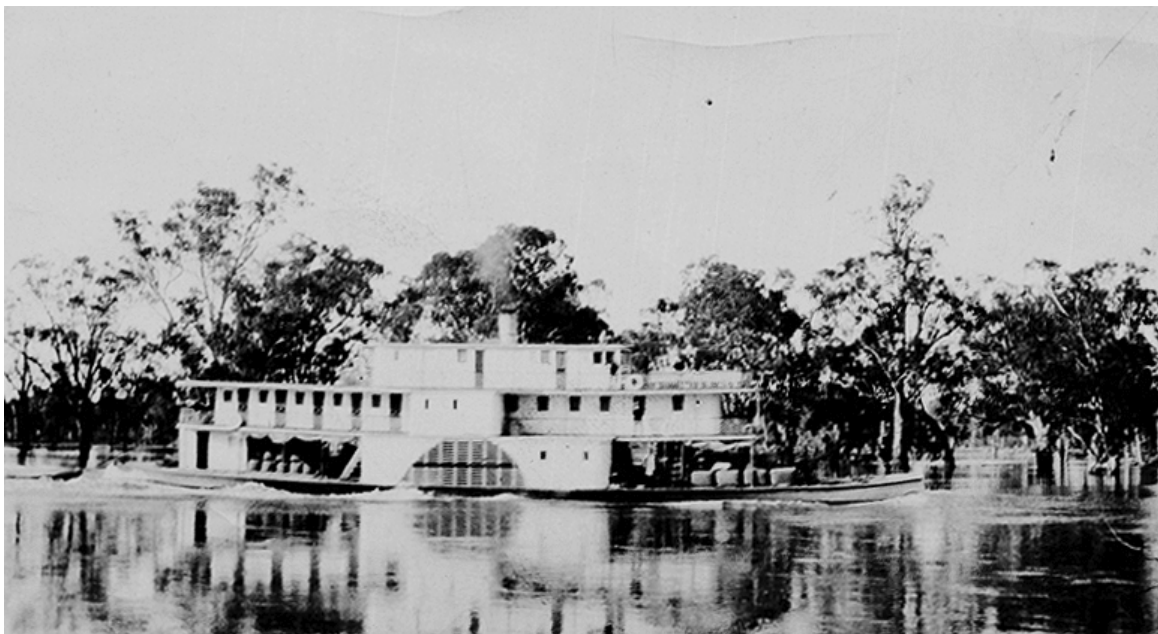
In 1847 John Grant occupied the Bumbang peninsula, which was then, he claimed, the southernmost station from Sydney and he was granted a pastoral lease for a run of 19,000 acres.⁵ The lease extended from the river towards Manangatang. Grant handed the property over to his son Simon, who ran the property for another ten years until it came into the possession of a bank. Kay Grose is a former teacher at Robinvale and a member of the Euston/Robinvale Historical Society:

'It was called the Oriental Bank or something – that bank went broke and it was in the hands of somebody else: then a man called Creswick bought it. Creswick bought a lot of properties, he was a pretty wealthy man and made himself wealthier by buying up lots and lots of properties.'⁶

By the 1870s, Euston had become a busy inland port and bullock teams brought their vast loads of wool and wheat to the fleet of ships and barges that transported the consignments to Echuca and Morgan, the South Australian downstream terminal. In those days teamsters made fortunes, drawing lots for priority to discharge their loads into the ship's slings.⁷ By 1885 Euston consisted of a small town with a courthouse, a whipping post (to which prisoners were bound and flogged with the cat o' nine tails), a punt, wharf, bond store, wool scourer, boiling down works, tax office, two hotels and an eucalyptus factory. The river steamers brought food, mainly flour and sugar. In Hazel Porter's book *The Story of Euston* (1949) she writes of a Mrs Elizabeth Leslie who had lived in Euston from 1875 and who, at the time of writing had 17 children, 25 grandchildren and about ten great-grandchildren. Mrs Leslie gave her this insight of how things were in Euston in the late 19th century:

'We killed our own sheep for meat and made kangaroo soup. Some of the people around ate snakes and porcupines too. Porcupine is just like pork and is quite alright, they say, cleaned and fried. But no, I never ate them. I made all my own bread and the yeast as well. There always seemed to be a batch of dough rising. On baking days we used quandongs as dried fruits. I have a bush or two of them growing out the back here, by the garden gate. Quandongs are native shrubs, you know, dear. Quandongs are lovely in cakes – their berries turn a red colour in season, and dried and stoned, we used them freely.'⁸

Three types of boats travelled the Murray: cargo barges, cargo/passenger steamers and hawkers' boats. The largest passenger boat was the 'Gem', now at the Swan Hill Pioneer Settlement. The 'Gem' was built at Moama, NSW in 1876 and was purchased by Captain High King for the Morgan-Wentworth trade. Between 1882 and 1886 she made several trips upstream to Echuca but Captain King found that the boat was not of sufficient size to cater for the increasing river trade, so she was taken to South Australia to be enlarged. She was beached there and cut in half. The two halves were pulled apart by bullock teams and an additional 40 feet was added to the centre of the vessel, increasing her length from 97 feet to 137 feet.⁹



Paddle steamer 'Gem' (date unknown)

Some of the boats were still in use in the 1930s, as Robinvale resident Jenny Black writes:

‘The ‘Invincible’ carried passengers and freight between Swan Hill and Mildura. She departed Swan Hill at 9:30 pm on Tuesdays and returned the next Monday morning in time to catch the train from Swan Hill to Melbourne. The barges towed by the steamers were most important – the biggest barge was the ‘Pevensey’, which carried the largest load transported by water: 2150 pressed bales of wool. The cargoes consisted mainly of wool, wheat, timber, tallow and supplies for the river towns. Before the railway line reached Mildura and Swan Hill, there were 220 registered trading boats. Life in a riverboat was busy and interesting. Low rivers, ever-changing sand bars, plus the problem of towing a string of barges around a bend made navigation difficult. On the Murray tributaries, the Darling and Murrumbidgee rivers, droughts and consequently low rivers sometimes stranded river boats on the upper reaches for months and even years.’¹⁰

There are some legendary stories attached to the river trade, as skippers vied with each other to capture the first seasonal loading of wool:

“Once when Captain Randell was racing to gain a load, his fuel was running short, so instead of stopping to take up wood, he ordered his crew to stoke the boilers with sides of bacon from the cargo. Randell won, but imagine the smell!”¹¹

Val McGinty, a Robinvale resident witnessed the riverboat trade in her youth:

‘When we first came to Robinvale the steamers used to regularly run down the Murray and there were times if we had a calf born on that morning, the calf would be named after the boat that went down that morning, maybe the ‘Ruby’ or ‘Marion’ or whatever - this is going back to when we were children. They were quite regular, the Number of boats and barges, and at the lock they used to pull the barges with a load of the stone that was required for the making of the lock, too.’¹²

Val’s husband Bill McGinty, a former Councillor of Swan Hill Rural City Council and honorary Mayor of Robinvale recalls:

‘The steamers carried a lot of wool. There used to be a landing over at Euston, which was a tin shed more or less, where they’d store the wool in there, take it out on to the barges and I can remember going down there one day and I picked up a double-headed penny – I’d never seen one before in my life. The people that came to pick the wool up, they’d play two-up in there, and I found it. One young fellow who knew more about double-headed pennies than I knew offered me three pence and I thought that was a great deal, so I took the three pence. He took the double-headed penny’.¹³

Jenny Black writes in the first part of her article:

‘I have always loved the riverboats and it was interesting at night to watch the lighted paddle steamers as they followed the winding course of the river. Especially in flood times, practically the whole boat could be seen through the trees, rather like a hovercraft. With a high river at ‘Robinswood’, I could sit up in bed and watch my favourite boats.’¹⁴

The Cuttles

Jenny Black was born Jeannette Cuttle in Kerang in 1920. Her father Herbert was the son of Herbert Edwin Cuttle and the family bought some land and established a little store in Ultima in 1901. Jenny Black reflects:

‘When I found a first picture of their little store, it looked about big enough for one person. Over the years they prospered and became merchants – they boasted that they bought everything a farmer had to sell and they sold everything a farmer had to buy. They sold just about everything –they even had a carpenter who put up Mallee cottages. They sold motorcars, machinery, they had a grain store, they bought wheat, and they sold clothing and groceries. Grandpa told me that the apprentice grocer had to be able to wrap a pound of sugar in a piece of paper and make a neat parcel, because in those days they didn’t have paper bags.’¹⁵

The Cuttles prospered in Ultima:

‘They had a nice house and a tennis court and a piano – it was a central part of the society of Ultima. Everybody was welcome and in the early days the Church services, it didn’t seem to matter which denomination, they were always held in their front room. I suppose they were a religious family – they did provide the money and built the Anglican Church in Ultima, and it has three lovely stained glass windows which they provided and gave as a memorial to their son George Robin Cuttle. He was shot down and killed in France, over Caix, I think. He was shot down before I was born, I never knew him.’¹⁶

The memory of George Robin Cuttle, known simply as Robin, was to play a significant part in the naming of the town of Robinvale. In 1912, Robin and his family made a trip in the ‘Invincible’ from Ultima to Mildura, stopping at Euston on the way for wood. They saw some land on the Victorian side of the border that appealed to them for farming. In 1913 the family purchased 3,000 acres of this land, known as ‘The Cliffs’, which also included land on the Bumbang peninsula and later bought another 6,300 acres of surrounding land. At the age of 16, Robin Cuttle took over the management of ‘The Cliffs’ property. Reports of Robin’s height vary, but most accounts have him as being six feet eight inches tall and fifteen stone in weight. Nicknamed *Tiny*, Robin was mad keen on motor engines and flying machines and when war broke out in 1914, he made up his mind to join the Australian Flying Corps. In 1915, he volunteered for active service at Ultima but was rejected by the doctor on the grounds of his eyesight. Not discouraged, Robin sailed for England in December 1915 to attempt to join the Royal Flying Corps.¹⁷

On the 19th April 1916, Robin wrote to his family:

‘Every day I’m keener on turning out a successful pilot. I’ve got a big hill climb ahead of me on account of my size, but I’m confident I’ll do it. I have the Major on my side, but if by chance my weight and size beats him, I’ll worm my way up to Billy Hughes. Though I’ll be the biggest and heaviest man flying I’ll do it, I’m sure. I intend flying over German lines before I return’.¹⁸

Robin started to take flying lessons. On 4th May 1916, he wrote:

‘In the afternoon I went to Hendon and had two decent flights of one hour and twenty minutes duration. The first flight was a short one on an old Wright biplane, one of those where the pilot sits on the front.’¹⁹

By July 1916, his transfer to the Royal Flying Corps was almost in the bag, but as he had to wait another six weeks for it to become effective, he decided to go to the front in France to fight. On 17 August he wrote:

'We are at present not firing, but soon will be as an aeroplane has just gone up to observe. Two Huns were over here a couple of minutes ago and our anti-aircraft hunted them off, and they are now being chased by two of our battle planes. I can at present hear the rattle of their Lewis guns.'²⁰



Robin Cuttle, 1916

Robin was awarded the Military Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry in action' during the Battle of the Somme while attached to the 9th Division of the Scots Guards and by the end of August

1917 he was finally accepted in the Royal Flying Corps as an observer gunner. He bought new flying coats and prior to leaving England wrote:

'I bought a new pair of Triplex goggles at £2 and another pair of flying gloves, real beauties, covered with Musquash and lined with beautiful fine kid. They are made in two parts and can be separated for working the gun. When only flying you wear the whole lot, but when you want free fingers, the top folds back and clips out of the way. They are the latest flying outfit and wonderfully warm and efficient. I tried them today at 16,000 feet and it was as warm as toast, as they ought to be, as they cost three guineas.'²¹

Robin took delight in aerial combat over France. On 2nd February 1918 he wrote:

'As soon as we got back to the line the pilot made me take control. He was a bit tired, so I had to bring her from the line to our aerodrome and down from 16,000 ft. They teased me about it for the rest of the day, for when we landed I was deaf. I was so busy trying to come down as quickly as possible that I had forgotten to blow my eardrums out. When coming down quickly from a great height it is necessary to do that otherwise you are deaf for an hour or so. What a lot of rot I've written about a trip over the line? Gee, it's an interesting life.'²²

On the 8th May 1918 at 12:10 pm, Robin Cuttle and his pilot, Lt. Leckie were shot down and their aircraft crashed in a field near Caix. Scraps of wreckage and a bomb cap suggested that the plane carried a bomb aboard when it crashed. There is no known grave. Robin was just 22 years old. Family legend has it that in 1924, Mrs Cuttle, still mourning her son, erected a banner made of hessian and flowers on the day of the extension of the railway line to the Murray River reading 'Vale, Robin' or 'Robin, Vale' and that the town created took its name from that sentiment.²³



A 49 Squadron 'C' Flight aircraft in flight. Note how high the observer is standing in his cockpit. v.J. Garwood

Robinvale

As the railway line crept north, so did the Cuttle family's business and expanded with it. In 1916, the Cuttles planted 10 acres of oranges at 'The Cliffs'. It was the first citrus in the district and a very successful crop. In 1919 they purchased from Creswick the one square mile of freehold of the old pre-emptive right of Bumbang Station and share farmed the area. When in 1922, urged on by the Cuttles, the Victorian Government announced their decision to extend the railway line to the Murray River, the Cuttles engaged R A Black to survey their proposed township on the Murray.

On the 13th June 1924 the railway line extension from Annuello to the Murray River was officially opened in a glittering ceremony. A special train arrived from Bendigo at noon and the Minister for Railways, Mr Eggleston officially opened the line while Mrs Cuttle cut the blue ribbon. Mr Eggleston said that the prosperity of the State depended on its railways. Then the Cuttles provided a splendid lunch for 50 invited guests at 'The Cliffs'.²⁴

On 11th September 1924, the following article (edited) appeared in 'The Herald':

VICTORIA'S NEW TOWN ON THE MURRAY

PIONEER'S ENTERPRISE WINS VICTORY FOR STATE

NEW BRIDGEHEAD SITE

By 'The Herald' Special Representative

The pioneering energy that has made Australia is not dead. Robinvale, a few months ago was only a place. In a few years it will become one of the most vigorous of the Murray River towns, an important bridgehead site, and a prosperous irrigation settlement. Now that Robinvale is on the map, possesses a railway station, a post office, a store and two other temporary appurtenances of a new town, the first stage of its fight for existence has passed. It has now reached the stage when its progress will be accelerated. It is the experience of new out-back towns that the first struggle is the most severe. When the railway arrives, progress is rapid. It has taken many years for the line from Korong Vale to reach the river. By stages it pushed up to Boort, then to Quambatook, Ultima, Chillingollah, Manangatang and Annuello, and finally to Robinvale. It is going further. The new town is the site for one of the huge bridges over the Murray provided for in the border railway agreement with New South Wales.

This bridge will cost £250,000. It will carry the Victorian Railway system over the river, 30 or 40 miles into the Riverina - and the Riverina people hope still further into New South Wales.

The last stage of this tendril of our railway system has been much more rapid than the first. It took a long while for the railway to reach Ultima; it was twelve years before it reached Manangatang, and three more years took it to Annuello; but only two years landed it at Robinvale.

THE NEW TOWN

The new town has been surveyed inside the natural river peninsula. To the west of the station the land is high. That has been reserved by town planners for a residential area. The east side of the line will be the business section. The present 'business portion' is on the west side of

the station and consists of three tin sheds. The permanent buildings are about to be commenced on the east side. Bank sites and boarding-house sites have been secured, and construction is about to begin. The tents and huts of the construction camp will be exchanged for houses as the settlement develops.

Between 70,000 and 80,000 acres of this country are let on short grazing leases by the government. This land is being held for irrigation purposes. As soon as market prospects improve, irrigation development is certain to follow. These red plains are deep soiled and naturally well-drained. There is every prospect of a sound citrus and vine industry practically everywhere in this district. Victoria may expect big things from Robinvale.²⁵

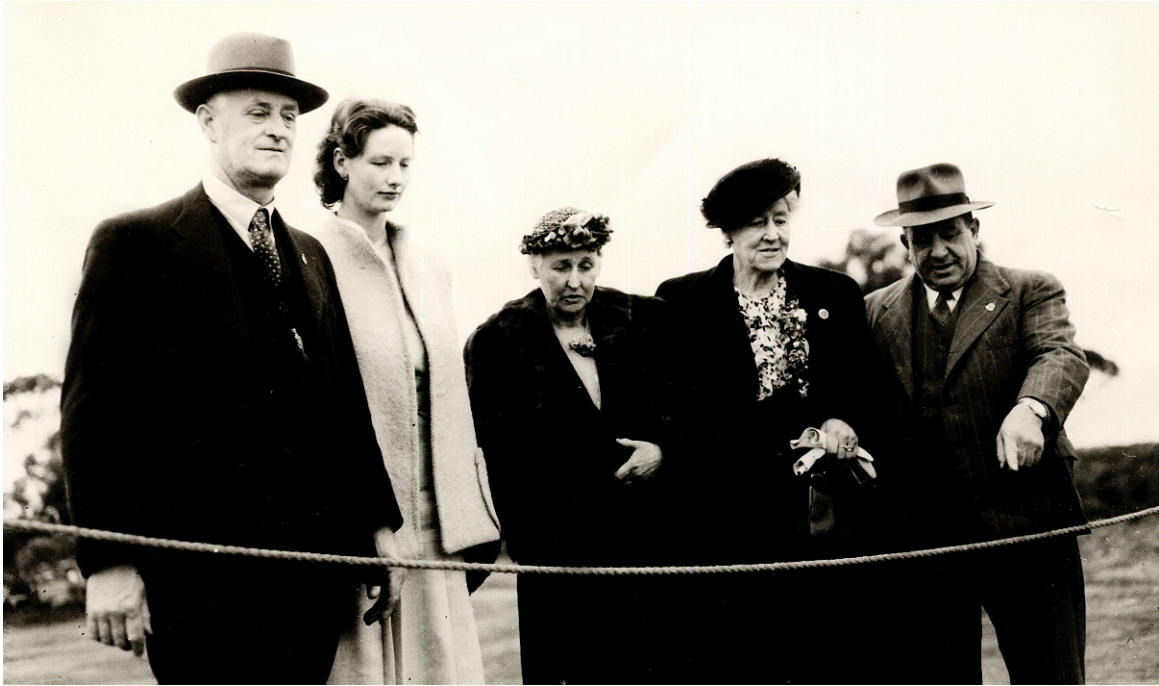
On 24th October 1924, the Cuttles held a land auction for lots in Robinvale. An account given in 1969 by Mrs Doris Arnott (then Ethel Doris Kilpatrick) to Mrs Christina Clifford of the day of the sale survives:

'The train left Bendigo at 5.05 a.m., calling at all stations. Breakfast was at Korong Vale at 6.49 a.m. and luncheon at Robinvale 1 p.m. To ensure a seat on the train, we were able to obtain a coupon from the Auctioneers and exchange it at the rail station. The fares were 'Holiday Excursion'. My mother, Mrs Kilpatrick and I drove from Swan Hill to Ultima by horse and jinker and boarded the train at Ultima. The luncheon was served in a large marquee erected on land where Arnott's store now stands, and the folk were served sausages and potatoes and plenty of tea, bread and butter. The platform where the auctioneers sold from was a four-wheeled wagon and stood about where the State Savings Bank is now. There were many blocks sold that day and the price was high. On our return trip, deposits were collected and deals signed up. The auctioneers were Bert Hussy from Swan Hill and George Pethard from Bendigo'.²⁶



Robinvale land auction, 1924

Mrs. E. Kilpatrick bought the first block of land sold near the railway station and erected a boarding house on which she bestowed the grand title of 'Alcove Accommodation House', and where a three-course dinner could be obtained for two shillings.²⁷ After the sale, Robinvale commenced to take shape.



The Cuttle family at the land sale (Jenny Black second from left)

Stan Parke, born in 1920, was brought to the area by Cobb & Co coach in 1923:

'When we first came here there was just a wine shanty, I think - a hut that dispensed wine, that's about all, and there was the old homestead of Bumbang Station. ²⁸



Bumbang Station homestead, 1926

Of all the persons interviewed for this project, Bill Peart, at 90 was the eldest. Bill is one of twelve children who came to Robinvale a year after the town opened. We asked him for his full name - how he had been christened. Bill replied in characteristic larrikin style:

'Belted over the head with a bottle of plonk. No, William Edward Peart is my full name, born on the 26th October 1913. ²⁹

Bill recalls the early days of Robinvale:

'The shops were across on the punt road, going to Euston. There was Cuttle's Mallee Store - he had about six shops. Then there was the Post Office, a tin place - Jack Cockerel was the bloke that managed it, only a small tin place, and he camped in a tent near it. The next one down was people by the name of New, Roy New. That's all the town there was'.



Robinvale, 1920s

Asked how many houses there were in Robinvale then, Bill explained:

'There was one down at the cut, it got burnt down eventually, there was Bumbang homestead, there was Ashcroft's, that was up George St. – shifted there.... and they'd just finished the two railway houses. That's about it. There was about 30 of us who went to school came here, and there was a big tin hall there in George St. – that's not far from here – Cuttle built it and it was used as a store room and that was our school'.

We asked Bill if he had ever met Mr Herbert Cuttle personally:

‘Oh crikey yes, we used to pinch his stuff, pinch his sheep – during the Depression I mean – knock a sheep over and that type of stuff. We had to have something to eat during the Depression, and we went and shot a sheep, and also from the station property to Euston Station, across the river, you’d go over and pick one and shoot it, and also in Euston there, on the police paddock, the sheep round there. You had to do that to get a feed. We used to go down there and pick what we wanted and knock it arse overhead, and that was it, you see.’³⁰

Bill’s childhood home at Robinvale gives us a very clear insight into the times:

‘The first place we lived in was up at the railway station – it was made of cement brick, big pieces of cement brick. It wasn’t very big – three or four of us sleeping in a double bed – the boys, two at each end. We used to fight a bit over it, kicking the stinking feet. There were a couple of houses there before Robinvale was opened – weatherboard places, and one was burnt down at the cut down there, and the others are gone now, they didn’t last that long, only weatherboard. We lived at the railway and then Dad got leave of absence and we got free living at the old Bumbang Homestead. We got stuff to renovate with 2 x 2, that was a drop log place. You don’t see many of them about now, made of pine logs, split and just put down on the sides, dropped down, two pieces of timber standing up, they dropped down. They were lined inside with a hessian paper. Bumbang Homestead was built centuries ago, I suppose. From there he wanted to pull it down – Cuttle did – so we had to shift and Dad got a place at Euston. We stopped there for a while, then Dad got a job on the lock and it was too far to walk, so we shifted down below the lock and built a shack, a sort of a camp down there. We had three tents as well as the other place. The walls and that were made of bitumen tin that I opened and flattened out, burnt the bitumen off as much as I could, and they formed the outside. During a hot day the dogs would lie around in the shade, but the bitumen would be dropping off on to them. From there – we got sick of that – the lock had finished, so we went out to Lattens Bend and the place there that a chap named Beech – he had this other place and he loaned us that house. In 1931 the flood came up and it was just about lapping the bank and we had to shift out of it and came back to Robinvale again and moved into one of Cuttle’s cottages’.³¹

Full of enthusiasm for the new Robinvale, Herbert Edwin and Margaret Anne Cuttle decided to retire at Robinvale on the banks of their beloved river. The old drop-log Bumbang homestead was demolished and in its place. ‘Robinswood’ was built. The move from ‘The Cliffs’ was made about 1926. The new house was wired for electricity and water was heated by a copper coil in the stove and piped to the kitchen and bathroom, an innovation for those times in the country. The garden was planted with fruit trees, flowers and vegetables and in front of the house was a circular lawn on which Jenny and her friends played croquet. So were the innocent days of pre-Depression, pre-War Robinvale.³²



All aboard for tennis, 1920s

The Crossing

Even before Robinvale was created, the Victorian Railways had committed themselves to extending the line to the Murray River and beyond. This meant crossing the broad Murray River at Euston so that trains could get across. In 1923, work commenced on the construction of a long bridge, a considerable undertaking for the times. Before the bridge was built, the only way of crossing the Murray had been by punt. Stan Parke recalls:

‘When we first came here my sister used to go across and get the stores from Euston on a punt. There was one occasion where she was on one side of the river and a chap with cattle was on the other side and there was no punt man there. So he persuaded her – she was 10, I think – to wind the punt across, and she did’.³³



Robinvale-Euston punt

The punt could carry only two horses and carts or four cars at a time. Len Arnott, a long-term Robinvale resident, points out:

‘It wasn’t a mechanical system, it was manual. It would run up against the bank, and then someone would get a big wheel and turn it and that actually took the punt across the river – physically – a person turning a wheel. There’s one famous story about one of Robinvale’s most loved and most eccentric men who was very much a teetotaller. He went across to Euston one night and spent a very pleasant evening with likewise a teetotaller family in Euston. He got back to the punt at the same time as a man who had a very pleasant night at the Euston pub, and this fellow said, ‘Alec, don’t worry I’ll get it across.’ So he started turning the wheel and Alec noticed he had a hip flask of brandy or something, so Alec walked over, took it out of his pocket, walked to the side of the punt, and said, ‘You’ve had enough of that tonight’ and dropped it over the side. That’s a famous story that concerns the punt. The man who worked during the daylight was Jack Leslie – he manned it in the daylight hours,

but if you got there after work hours you had to get yourself across. If you were on the wrong side of the punt that was too bad, you had to wait until someone brought it back the other way, and that could be an evening – all night – could be next morning, quite easily'.³⁴



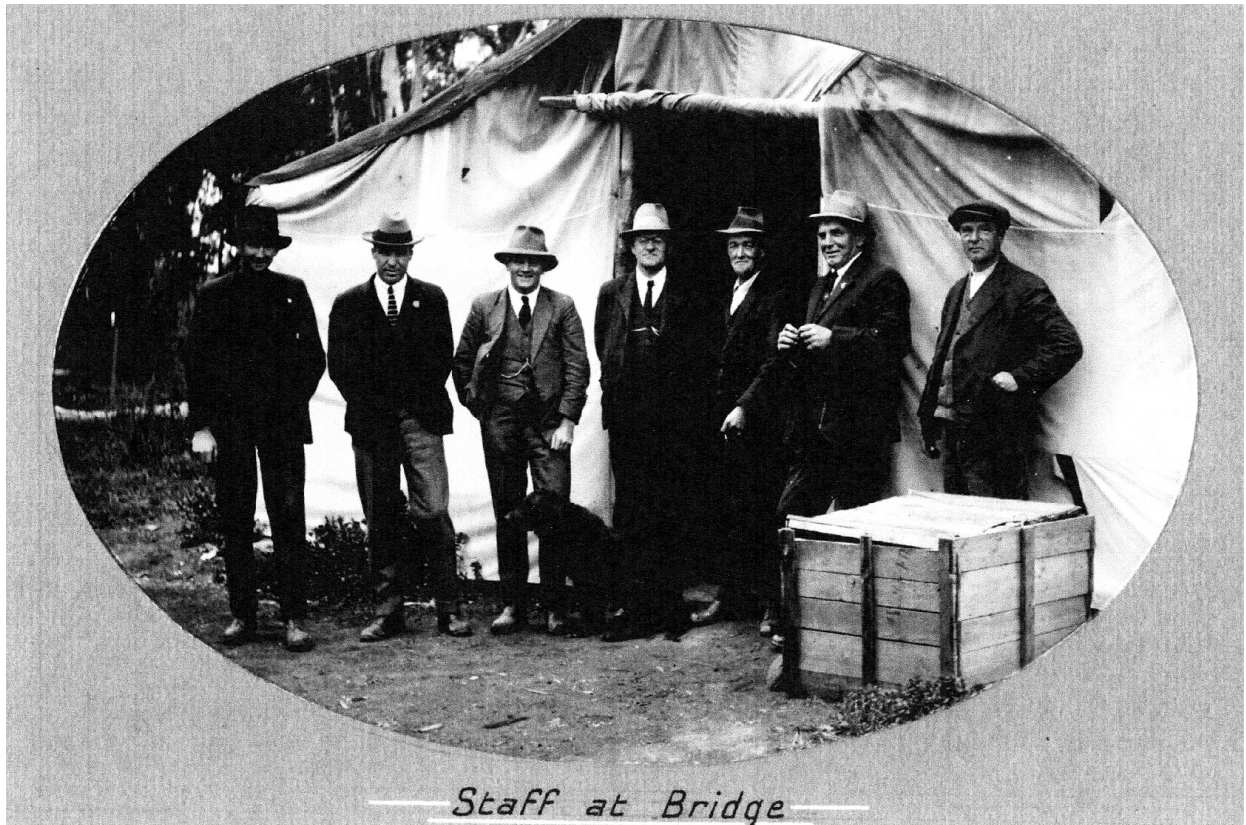
Alex Vine's car missed the punt

On 15th May, 1923, work commenced on the construction of the approaches to the bridge, which was to provide for both road traffic and the Victorian five foot, three inch gauge rail line. The bridge had to be of sufficient height and width not to impede navigation of the river. The cost of the bridge and its lengthy approaches, estimated at about £1,000,000 was to be borne two-thirds by the Victorian and one-third by the NSW Government. The railway station site was to be determined by the position of the bridge, which had to be within four miles of Euston. On June 10th, 1924, the 'Argus' newspaper stated that the bridge approaches would be

one and a half miles long and that the main portion was to consist of two openings of 51 ft each, four openings of 101 ft each and a lift span of 60 ft.³⁵

Reports of the Number of men engaged in the construction of the bridge vary from between 50-100. Bill Peart's father was one of them, as Bill explains:

'We came up here on the first Saturday of April, 1925. The bridge had started – they had earth works done a bit on this side and they were putting a railway line in, putting a spur line in down here on the caravan park, on the high ground there. That was a temporary one and they'd put a bit of dirt and a few wooden gum piles for the start of the bridge that they were going to build. There wasn't a bridge then, it was the works to the bridge part. Then they started to build it with picks and shovels, and they had horse-drawn scoops and ploughs to rip up the ground to form all this formation along the side. Steamers had power – down at the bridge down here there was a big place, like a blacksmith's shop. There was an abundance of firewood round here, box or gum or whatever they wanted in two or three foot lengths, some were five feet. It was steam power they had – there was no electricity at Robinvale then.'



'We as kids used to go down there and look around and Dad was sick of it. It was £7.0.0 odd a fortnight he got for wages – that was a lot of money, I suppose. Dad was a cluey bloke – he was given a job as a boss, a ganger or whatever. They were getting gravel for the top of the bridge and he went out and had a gang there, digging gravel on Euston Station. They started to drive a few wooden piles down the side – it took a while and looked pretty rough too. Some were steam-driven and others were pulled up with a horse and let drop with a big hammer that weighed about three

tons. That was built out and on the other side they had to do a bit too, but then they started off with concrete, what's there now, for the bridge itself. They drove in piles in a type of a circle to make it waterproof, so they could pump it out and put the concrete foundations in. They had little equipment to do these things, there's no doubt about that. They put in what they call a little cofferdam – big steel piles – they knitted it together and they drove them in and that made it waterproof pretty well, and they pumped them out and started digging the mud out and all that type of stuff to get down to the foundations to put the concrete in. My older brother was working there, that's Joe – he used to mix the concrete up there, where they had this place waterproofed. It was barges along either side where the bridge was going to be, where they were working, and they worked off that too. Eventually, they got a lot of concrete in and it was reinforced with steel, they put one in at a time and they got these in, and I heard it was said that they were putting coins there, well Joe says, yes that's right, we put coins, stuck them into the concrete on the outside of them before it got dry and they used to stick there, that type of stuff. Threepences and pennies – mainly pennies, penny and halfpenny ones.' ³⁶

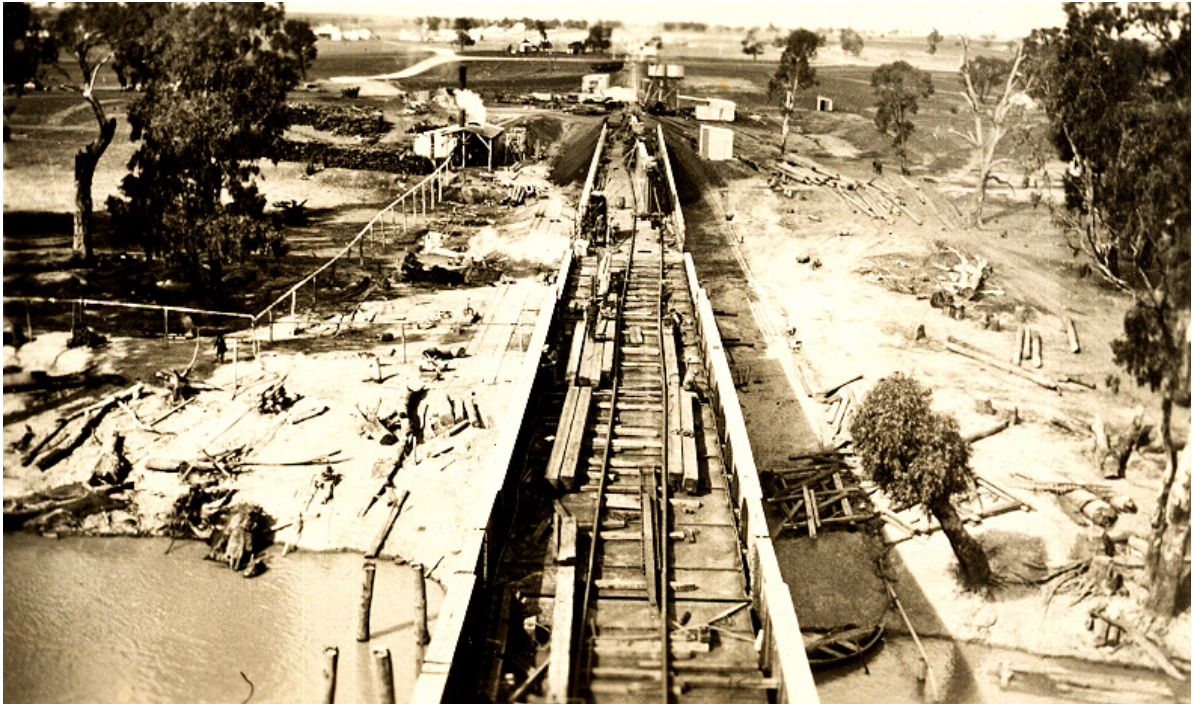


Diver working on bridge, 1920s

Bill Peart recalls where the men camped and slept:

'They had tents and shacks all along the riverbank, right over to the punt road there. The head staff of the bridge – the Victorian Railway Construction Company, they were building the bridge I think – they had little cubicles about this size for hired qualified staff. There were about four or five houses for married – that type of staff – between where the Rowing Club is now and Robinswood. They were weatherboard places, brought up here on railway trucks in sections. Kerosene was the only power and they had pressure pumps to pump up the air and light it that way, and the gas.' ³⁷

Red gum sleepers for the bridge and train line were cut at Bumbang Island and towed on barges by the 'Ruby Ellen' or 'Invincible' to the bridge site. A loop line from the station to a wharf near the present caravan park carried construction material and equipment for the bridge. ³⁸



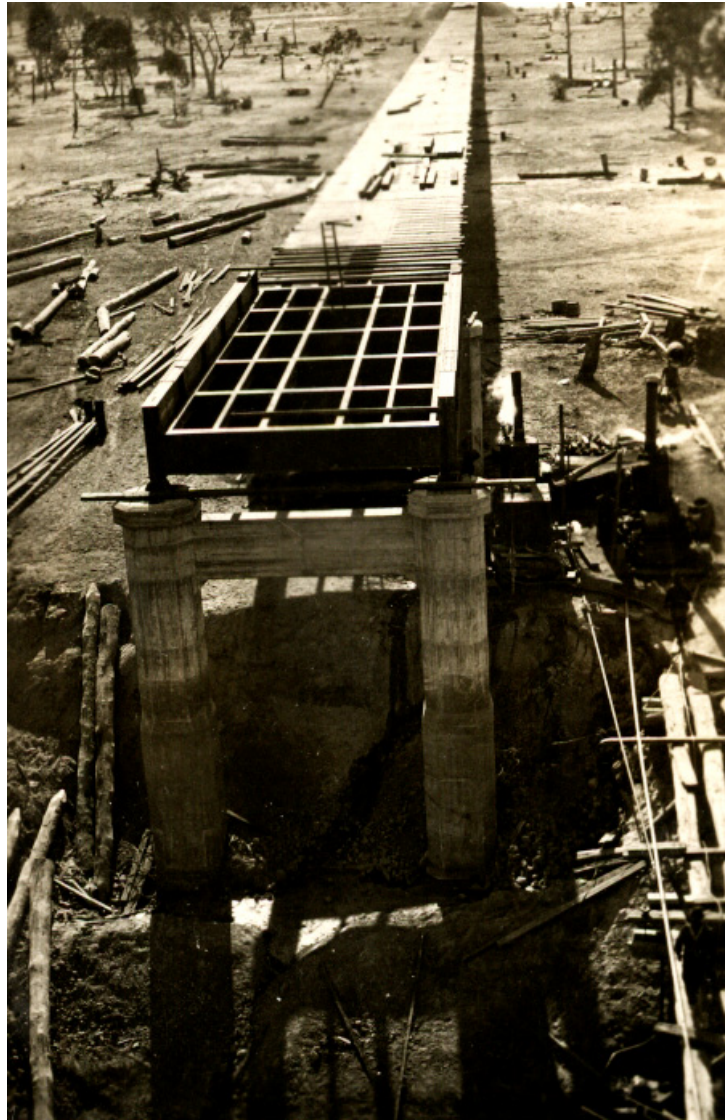
Early stages of bridge approach construction

The bridgework was not completed without its toll. Len Arnott adds:

‘There were two men killed during the actual construction of the bridge. I’m relying on my mother’s notes here. She said: ‘Two men were killed during the building of the bridge, Roy Branda and Mr Seaford’.³⁹

Bill Peart refers to two accidents which could have been the ones that killed Branda and Seaford, although he cannot recall the names of the men:

‘The workers, there were two of those – one knocked off work with a group to go to Euston for a few beers. They had some boats at the bridge down here, but they were all on the other side of the river, they couldn’t get them unless they swam over, but this bloke – there was a cable from part of the bridge across to the NSW side, a big cable coming down on an angle from high up, so he got up there and he started to go over, hand over hand, down this cable to the ground. Well, he slipped and he crashed down into the punt where they used to work underneath it. He died there. The other one was a carpenter, up on top of the lift span there, right up on top, they were putting the top on there, and they had timber there. They used to stand and walk around type of thing, these carpenters, to do their job. Well, this bloke was there and apparently these planks tipped sideways a bit, and of course he slipped and he came down and hit the bottom down there in the river, and he was killed. They found his three-foot ruler on the part of the timber that dropped out of his pocket as he was coming down.’⁴⁰



Bridge approaches further advanced

Bill Peart recalls another fatal event concerning the wife of one of the men:

‘They had their camp down there on the punt road down there, and she was home there and the fire was outside, an open fire, you see. They had a tent and they had gum leaf stuff over the top to make a bit of a shade, you see. Anyway, one day apparently that caught fire and she apparently rushed in and got her baby and came out, she was on fire a bit, and there were some people lived close by, by the name of New - the boys rushed across and she was screaming out: ‘Save my baby, save my baby’ and she had it in her arms and her clothes were burning – had them long dresses those times, and she threw it at them and he caught it. But she died and the place was burnt down. She was the wife of one of the workers – he was at work that day, he came home and there was nothing there.’⁴¹



View of construction from lift span



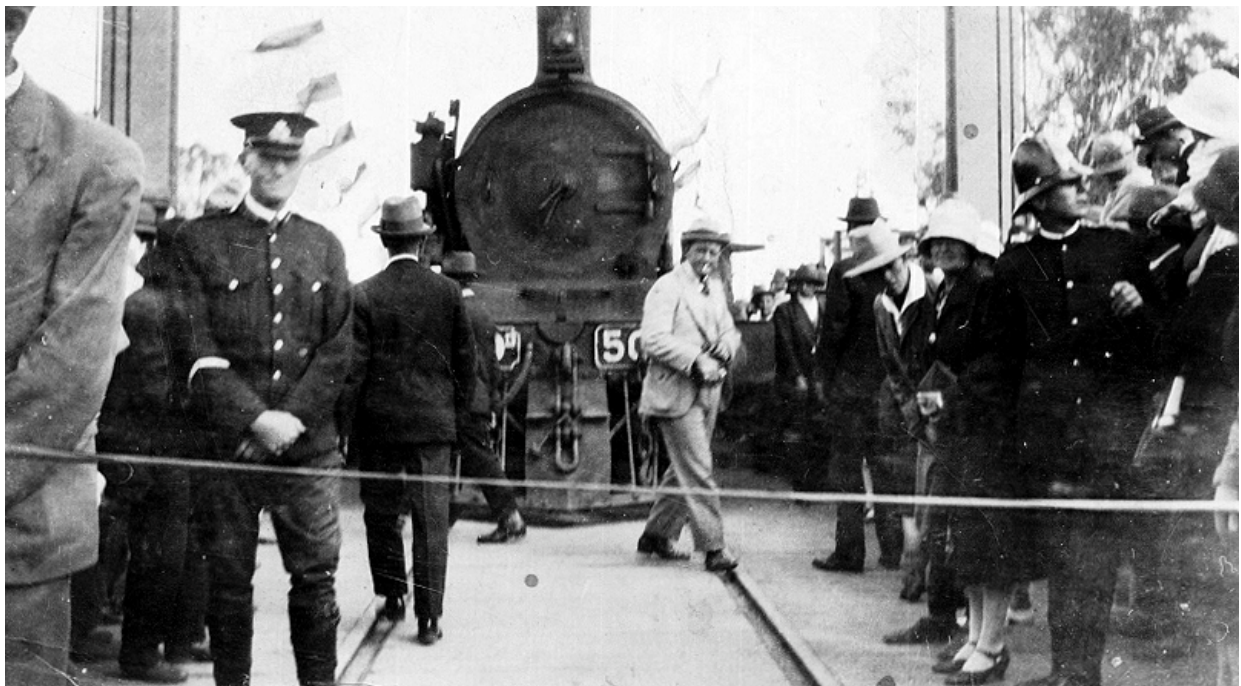
Bridge nearing completion, 1928

The bridge opened on 14th March 1928 amid great fanfare. A train travelled across the bridge and Mrs Rosa Leslie cut the ribbon. Stan Parke, then only 7 was on that first train to cross into New South Wales:

'I was on the train, I can remember that, the first train across the bridge. I just went in with our parents and all the dignitaries were saddled round the place at the station and then we all got on the train, and the train huffed and puffed across the bridge to the siding on the other side, at Euston. The only passenger there was one of Paddy McGinty's goats, and then we came back again.'⁴²

Bill Peart, of course, was also there:

'There were two carriages and a type of guard's van or something, and everybody piled in, including us kids, tooted the horn a few times and we went across the bridge.'⁴³



Bridge opening day, 14 March 1928

The train drivers were very helpful. Trevor Wilde's mother had a dairy and transported milk on the train:

'Mum used to milk a few cows and she had cans of cream to go to Bendigo. When she had no way of getting the cans of cream up to the station for the train to take it, the train people used to back the train down and help her carry them across and put them in the van for her. Back in those days the old train to Melbourne – it used to be a passenger and a goods train together and I left here on a Sunday night to go to Melbourne and I got down there – it took us nearly two days to get to Melbourne because they used to have to shunt at every station, and shunt around to pick up all the trucks and that sort of thing. It was quite interesting.'⁴⁴



Larrikins on the train on opening day

Len Arnott also rode the trains:

'When I was going to school, on more than one occasion the train would be travelling from Melbourne to Robinvale and of course it would leave Melbourne a full train and the further you got north, the less people there were. By the time you were nearing Robinvale I'd be the only person on the train. So you'd get out of the passenger compartment, go down to the guard's van and help him sort the parcels into groups, and on more than one occasion he'd hand me a shovel and say, 'We've got to clean the line' so we actually shovelled the sand off the line, so the train could get through. Then we'd get to Manangatang, which is about 35 km down the road, and once they'd unloaded the parcels the train crew would go across to the pub to have a bit of a drink. Of course, being a school kid I wasn't allowed to go to the pub, so I'd walk round the streets of Manangatang at night time until they had their drink and then we'd get back on the train, and off we'd go again.'⁴⁵



Crowd at bridge opening

After Robinvale, the train line was further extended to the New South Wales towns of Korakee and Benanee, but those settlements never produced the quantity of wheat crops expected. Len Arnott remembers:

‘The train went across when there was wheat or wool, or sufficient produce to warrant a trip, which was only once or twice a year, I think. ‘Darkie’ Nolan, the train driver used to pay my brother and I one penny each to open the gates to shut off the traffic, then you’d move the gate round to let the trains go through, so ‘Darkie’ would arrange with Dad that my brother and I would go down to the bridge and he’d toot the train horn and we’d swing the gates round and we used to get a penny for doing that on occasions.’⁴⁶

The rail line became uneconomic and the last train to pass over the bridge did so in March 1943.



Commissioner's train, 1928

The Great Depression

In 1931, a major flood and a severe worldwide economic downturn hit Euston and Robinvale with a vengeance. The good times were well and truly over as the Depression tightened its grip over the land. To make things worse, world prices of wheat slumped to four shillings and sixpence per 3-bushel bag, compared to £1 in the early 1920s.⁴⁷ James Hickey, in his 1974 publication 'Fifty Years of Robinvale' writes:

'The unemployed from the cities walked the roads in search of work, or to cadge enough tucker to live. Seasons were mostly bad during those 20 years from 1926 and the Mallee was a dust bowl. Kerosene lamps would be lit in schools and home, darkness would close in with a sky full of red dust. During those 20 years, there were only three good years: 1931, 1939 and 1942.'

Stan Parke also remembers those cheerless days:

'My mother was a pretty good housekeeper and we used to grind our own porridge and she used to make her own bread, but there were quite a few people that she fed that were on the road at that time, sometimes in the horse and jinker, and sometimes walking alone. Families used to come in the horse and cart and get a handout, get a billy of tea and some scones – she was always making scones. We used to trade with, say, an apple grower – for a bag of wheat we'd get so many apples, and that sort of thing. There wasn't any money about. The best year we had as far as growing was concerned, I remember we got a magnificent wheat crop at 1/6d a bushel - that was in the early '30s.'⁴⁸

Meat was only three pence per pound, but as most families could not afford to pay that - they lived on milk and eggs.⁴⁹

Len Arnott thinks back:

'They were very, very tight times. Mum would buy soup bones, cut the meat off and make pasties and then make soup out of the bones - that would make two meals. It was a big struggle.'⁵⁰

Val McGinty, born in 1927 provides these interesting insights into life during the Depression:

'We had kerosene lamps and candles. My mother had the dairy and she used to have to milk cows and so she had to get up very early in the morning, and she'd have a lantern and take it down to the cow yard and hang it on a post, so that she could milk the cows, to get the milk, which we used to deliver as children in billies on our bikes around the town. We had to do that before school and then again in the evening because in those days there were no refrigerators and when the cows were milked, the milk was delivered fresh to the people. Some people had ice chests, some had Coolgardie safes, which were hessian around a box and water in the top with towels draping down over so that the water would drip into the hessian to try and keep things cool. If we had a jelly it was only for special occasions, such as a birthday, because it was so hard to set a jelly – this was in the summer time – because we hadn't any cooling much to set it with. We'd take it all round the house to try and find the coolest spot – with cloths and things over it.'⁵¹

'We (kids) had to do the washing, we had a scrubbing board that we scrubbed the clothes on and we'd put them into a copper and boil up the copper. At one stage my mother had a line down on the river bank, strung up between two gum trees and

took the copper down there to do the washing down on the river with the scrubbing board and the tub because we had no water supply. We used to carry water in four gallon kerosene tins up to the house to supply water for home use and for bathing and everything'.⁵²

For Jenny Black, then still living at Ultima, things weren't quite as grim. She came on visits to Robinvale from the age of eight:

'I used to come up and down to Robinvale on holidays with my sister and we came on the little 'Red Rattler', which is really like a square bus on wheels. Everyone said they were square wheels because they bumped along the railway. It took us four hours - it's 80 miles from Ultima to Robinvale. Grandpa would collect us and we would have wonderful holidays because the river was clear, Grandpa would get us up at dawn and we'd go off on his boat and fish and come home with our breakfast. He would clean and cook the fish. We had great summers in Robinvale too, because every evening we got into the boat – it had a centre board so that you could put up a sail and sail up and down the river, and two sets of oars, so we could have eight grandchildren all pulling, because when we were small we could only handle two to an oar, because they were pretty heavy, and we felt that we had really graduated when we were allowed a whole oar. He would make our fishing rods out of bamboo and he was very good at splicing and binding and all that sort of stuff. He taught us to cast, and we used to practice because we had to be good at casting our lines in, he taught us how to put our hooks on, and which size for which fish, and the bait. We had a four gallon kerosene tin with holes in it to let the water drain out and we tied shin bones, or some other large bone in the bottom with Number 8 wire and you threw that in off the riverbank into shallow water and hoped to catch a lot of shrimps. We used shrimps, we dived for mussels, because we also used mussels, and we could catch plentiful cod, perch, bream, catfish, but we only ate cod and perch – everything else was put back into the water. We only caught what we needed to eat.

In the summer evenings when it was hot, he'd fill the boat up and we'd take a picnic and travel up to a lovely sand bar, opposite the cut, down away from the bridge. Upstream it was reasonably shallow, and downstream we could dive off into the water, because sand bars have very steep bottoms, they shelve very sharply. And there is a barge across it – an old barge falling to bits, and that used to belong to my father. He had a lease on Bumbang Island, grazing rights. He used to bring sheep and cattle across when the moon was rising.

The river was extraordinarily clear and the sunsets were lovely, but we always ate the same thing – we had boiled eggs, which Grandpa cooked, we ate those with bread and butter. Then we had freshly made cake, because Grandma always had a girl in the house, and fresh fruit and Billy tea. We had that every night and we all enjoyed it because we were always hungry.

Grandma was very fond of bridge, playing cards, and we also had Mah Jong, and she would have two card tables set up, one for Mah Jong, one for cards. We played all sorts of things – anyone who could play cards was welcome and when they were constructing the bridge she would have had a lot of people from there up to have a meal, or play bridge."⁵³

As the Depression bit deeper, things did not go so well for the Cuttle family business:

'He had a very tough life, my father, because in those days the custom was that the storekeepers - they bore the brunt of selling the things that the farmers required, on the understanding that they would be paid when their crop was sold. So in actual fact

these storekeepers held the overdrafts, and if the crops failed, well of course it just was held over until the next year. There were some circumstances that forced a lot of storekeepers to fail. They were 13th on the list of people to be paid out. The government urged the farmers to plant more and more wheat, and they did, and they had a very good crop and then the Depression came along, and of course the banks wanted their money from the storekeepers and other people, and the storekeepers wanted money from the farmers and they didn't have any money, so there was a Farmers Debts Adjustment Board, and in actual fact the farmers did very well, and I've since been back to Ultima and old ladies and gentlemen have come up to me and said what wonderful people my father and grandfather were because without them, they would not still have their farms. So they were put into liquidation and it is on record that the fellow who was doing it, he had ammunition cases full of pieces of paper stating that this farm and that farm were owed so much money, and it totalled £328,000, which was a lot of money in those days.⁵⁴

The Lock

Construction of Lock 15 on the Murray at Euston began in 1924 at a point where the river is approximately 150 metres wide. However, the first two years of work were doomed to failure because of errors in plans and construction was suspended in 1926 because of flooding of the cofferdams and consequent destruction of much of the structure.⁵⁵ The 1931 flood washed away whatever remained.



1931 flood – looking towards Robinvale

Work commenced again in 1934 and the final structure was built on a sand foundation supported on a raft of timber piles. The 'Bendigo Advertiser' reported that 350 men worked on the Lock, providing much-needed employment during the worst of the Depression and that there were 52 workmen's cottages.⁵⁶ Bill Peart was one of the workers:

'I worked on that pretty well, after my age got up to about 18 or something. That was Lock 15 for Robinvale and Euston. There were a lot of people employed on the lock, apart from when the river broke through one of the cofferdams and it was put off until it was fixed up again. Oh, the lock, we got up around four to five pounds a week there. The work I did was mainly labouring, and digging sand down in the cofferdam and concreting, that type of stuff. When we first went there we built a shack below the lock, where it is now, near 'The Cliffs' – there were camps all along the river everywhere.'⁵⁷

Val McGinty lived at the lock for 18 months while her mother supplied the workers with fresh milk. Her brother, Trevor Wilde recalls:

'The lock was put in mainly for the riverboats, originally. They had them numbered from the Murray Bridge right through and our lock at Euston is Number 15. Mildura is Lock 11 and there were to be some more in between, but they never got done. Instead of building in the same spot, they moved about 100 yards downstream and built it again. It was a big thing – the train used to go out to the lock - they had a special line built to go out around there - there were 60 houses put there for the workers, we had a hall, which the school was in – it was used as a church. They had big offices out there as well, and they had a big crane each side of the river, which they used to call the flying fox and it had all the cement to put on the pylons. At the lock they built a cofferdam and they did all the work in there and then they moved round to let the water keep flowing through.

The lock was a good thing for irrigation, but they used it for riverboats, because in dry years each lock kept the water high enough so that they could get up the river with the paddleboats, that was the idea. But then the trains came to the wharves and the old river boats were just about finished – well, they were still going at the time of the 1939 flood, but after that there were not many more barges.'⁵⁸



Cofferdam construction at the lock

For the record, the lock chamber is 17 metres wide and 51 metres long and was designed to accommodate a river steamer and one barge. The lock gates are made of ironbark logs, 40 cm thick, and emptying was carried out by means of tunnels in the lock walls controlled by butterfly valves, manually operated. A fish ladder was incorporated to enable the fish to make their way upstream past the structure, which was finally completed in 1938.⁵⁹ The lock continues to function today.

The War Years

Just as the Depression was weakening, the war came to the Murray. As the young men enlisted, the younger ones, like Trevor Wilde, stayed in the town:

'There wasn't a great deal here – it didn't change things that much. I was a kid, I didn't realise – we never heard that Darwin got bombed or anything like that at the time. After school I used to work at the garage, and the owner had a paper shop and garage all in together – he went for a holiday, actually, and he went on his bike, the owner of it. He wasn't exactly a funny chap, just a bit different. He was pulled up somewhere, they thought he was a spy, or something, they didn't know what he was. There's been a few shop fires and that over the years. Once the grocer shop caught fire and the train came in and all it did was blow the whistle three times. That was a fire for Robinvale – there was no fire cart, nothing else, it just burnt to the ground. They couldn't do anything about it, they just let everyone know that there was a fire.'⁶⁰

Jack Forbes joined up when he was old enough to go to war:

'On my 18th birthday I was on the train to Melbourne. I joined the Air Force and I was in the Air Force short of three years, served part of it in aircrew training and then transferred into radio in ground staff. I spent 12 months in the Northern Territory. I started off doing my flying training to become a wireless air-gunner in Parkes, NSW. When that unit closed down they transferred us to Ballarat, but during my training there was one particular flight – we had trouble with a motor. The pilot indicated that it was time we got down, and so we landed in a paddock, which was fine. It wasn't a smooth landing, but we landed, and then they decided after we rang up that they would send out another aircraft with a mechanic to repair our aircraft, so we could fly back. The plane duly arrived, and as the plane few over us, a couple of hundred feet up, it looked perfectly OK, but I think he either did too tight a turn or something happened in the aircraft. He crashed in the paddock next door to us. *Boom, finito* – they both died.'⁶¹

Len Arnott recalls:

'During the war years things got very, very tight. You were on a quota of petrol, which meant that you couldn't go doing too much travelling. A lot of the men from here were overseas – there was a period of drought and people really did struggle to exist. Dad at one stage went down, early in the war and surveyed the Gippsland area with a view to leaving Robinvale and going there. He almost paid a deposit on a block of land, but Dad realized that with the war, with the Depression, with the uncertainty of quotas with clothing and the fact that Robinvale had a potential, decided to stick the war out, so we stayed here. But he nearly left because things were that tight in that period.'⁶²

'The recreation reserve was converted in part to a vegetable growing plot. Up near the school there were vegetables grown by Italians, it was down near the flat the Italians bought, and I believe they were amongst the first people of Australia to have used glasshouses. We put some of the first naturally dried vegetables on the Melbourne market and the Italians were the main group involved in that. Dad got on very well with the Italians. We used to go to their houses – most of them were struggling to live – the houses were very, very ordinary. But if you went out there, you were more than welcome with a cup of tea or a glass of wine.'⁶³

Val McGinty made her own personal contributions to the war effort:

'We were going to school, of course. One thing I missed out on at school was sewing, because they used to send up all the wool from Melbourne and we had to knit scarves, and socks and all the things that could be sent overseas to our soldiers. So that was our sewing for a number of years. Oh! We used to get so tired of the scarves and they had to be a certain length, so one girl would get on one end and the other on another to stretch it. We'd get so sick of this khaki wool.'⁶⁴

Bill McGinty adds:

'I used to knit socks. We weren't old enough to go to the war, thank God for that, but I had cousins that went to war and most of them never came back. But my family consisted of ten – nine boys and one girl – and each and every one has been extremely successful through hard work and commonsense. I'd go and stay with my aunty and she taught me to knit, so I'd sit up all night knitting these socks. During the war I can remember – my father didn't go to the war because he only had 25% eyesight in one eye. He had a mob of goats – McGinty's goats. We had to feed the lambs that my uncle would give us and raise them, so as we could eat them. We had rabbit every way possible: stewed, grilled, fried, you name it, we had it, but my mother was the best cook in the world. She was fantastic. She had to be, with ten kids. If you can imagine ten kids sitting around a table with a great plate of porridge every morning.'⁶⁵

With scarce resources, rationing became a fact of life, as Bill McGinty points out:

'You had ration tickets for butter and bread, sugar, clothing - there were some that liked a lot of clothing and they used to go around and say, 'Do you need all your clothing coupons? Could I have some please?' People just gave them to them. Things seemed to be much more friendly – money didn't seem to be the main thing in those days, not in the country anyhow. There was a lot of friendship, if anyone could help anybody, they used to do so.'⁶⁶

With a little extra effort, one could get through the war:

'You always had fowls and you had your eggs. A lot of people had their private cows and their own milk, rabbit and fish. I was a very keen fisherman. I would go out with a spinner, tie it behind the boat and you'd row off, you had no motors in those days, you'd row the boat. I could go out and get as much fish as I wanted in an afternoon – probably 12 or 15 nice Murray cod, as much as you wanted. I'd go out after school with my traps set for rabbits, get a few rabbits, come home and skin them and hawk them around the town for three pence each. That's what I used to do for a few shillings and I'd give that to my mother. My father, he'd trap rabbits but he was a great fisherman too. I can remember him one morning lifting a net and all that was left of the fish were bones and 86 crays – huge Murray crays. He'd take them up the bank and smash them up, because they'd just eat your fish. There were that many of them in the river, but there isn't today.'⁶⁷

Len Arnott has amusing memories of how the citizens of Robinvale supplemented their rations:

'I've seen ducks shot in Caix Square – it's near the Post Office – because when we had heavy rain, the water would run down the main street and make a lake there and you could walk to the front of the hotel with a shotgun, and provided you missed the Bank of NSW and the Post Office, you had the whole range. I've seen ducks shot frequently there in the main street and I've seen kangaroos hopping down the main street in the morning when I was a youngster.'⁶⁸

The war did not stop the citizens of Euston and Robinvale from enjoying themselves. Kay Grose arrived in Robinvale in 1943:

‘There were two pubs over at Euston and one in Robinvale, so if one wanted a little variety, one went over to Euston. We would go there to dances – one week it might be in aid of the Red Cross and another week it might be for the bush nurse, but we’d contrive to have a dance. Often the girls had to dance together because there weren’t too many fellows left in the district, there were so many away at the war.’⁶⁹

Val McGinty met her husband Bill at a dance:

‘Everyone used to go to the dances. In the country I think it was one of the main entertainments – we used to have it every Saturday night and we’d really look forward to Saturday night for the dance, where everyone would meet and everyone would dance with different people. They didn’t just have one partner like they do today and everybody mixed in. A lot of families used to go too - parents would go and it would be a family occasion in most cases.⁷⁰ I didn’t get to the dances in Euston for a long while because we had no way of going. We had to walk, and as we were girls we didn’t walk until there was a gentleman that had a truck and he used to pick up all the people that wanted to go to the Euston dance. We had to be at this café at a certain time and he’d take us over to Euston. We’d go on the back of a truck to Euston, to the dance.’⁷¹

Bill concurs:

‘The hall at Euston is the hall that we used to dance in, but maybe Euston one weekend, Robinvale the other. We would walk from Euston to Robinvale, have the dance and walk home after, led by my uncle. My uncle was a great dancer and he would lead all of us over and back, and that was one form of entertainment.’⁷²

Another form of entertainment was storytelling, as Bill reflects:

‘Every Sunday night my father, my uncle and my aunties would meet at our home and tell stories. They’d tell the same story every week, but different versions. We’d sit around and listen and it was great entertainment. We thought it was great listening to them telling stories, which possibly comes from the Irish, who are traditional storytellers.’⁷³

For those who could afford it, there was the entertainment offered by Mr Nulty, the picture show man. Len Arnott fondly remembers:

‘The movie man, he’d come every fortnight and he’d set up in the hall. We had the old hall up there – it was quite intriguing. You talk about a hall – that hall was a church, a school, a Law Court, a picture theatre, a dance hall, a ball theatre, a flower show place, wedding receptions – you name it – it was the entire thing. You’d go along every fortnight to the movies – we’d pull up the chairs that were normally around the wall. Perhaps there’d be 30 or 40 people and the movies would be on and then Mr. Nulty would load his van with his projector and off he’d go, and he’d come back a fortnight later with a new movie.’⁷⁴

Bill McGinty was fascinated by the movies:

‘They would come to the Euston hall, they’d put up a tent and that was their projection room and they would show through the door onto a screen that was probably yellow, but I would be there first thing next morning hoping I could find a little bit of film. My mother bought me a little Japanese tin projector. It had about six

inches of film with it and I put this piece of film in, hung a sheet on the wall and all my brothers and sister, we'd all sit there – I was the projectionist with a flat battery, and we would just see the image of these Japanese people sitting on the floor eating rice or something like that – this is true – and we would sit there for half an hour just looking at that one thing on the screen, with a flat battery. I'm not kidding. That's all we had, but my mother must have realized that I was going to be a projectionist.'⁷⁵

At the age of 14, Bill became an assistant projectionist for Nulty's pictures:

'Nulty's, they came from Ouyen, they would bring the film up here and I, being the assistant – and they'd send up a projectionist, but the projectionist, he liked his grog so much he'd get sprung and left me to do the job, so I learned the hard way. I can remember one night, we were showing a movie, I get to the last spool and it wasn't there, 2000 feet of film. It was called 'The Bird of Paradise' with Jeff Chandler. One of the Nultys got up on stage and told the people the end of the story and everyone was happy and went home and there wasn't a murmur. You couldn't do that today.'⁷⁶

Soldier Settlers

When the soldiers returned from the war, there was extra demand for services and materials. There was a shortage of almost everything, particularly housing, as Jenny Black affirms:

‘After the war building materials were very difficult to come by and Dad bought half the Balranald pub and set it up out at Tol Tol where he was growing olives. It was interesting because the kitchen window still had ‘Bar Parlour’ or something written on it. The pub was sort of cut in two and it arrived on a lorry. They move houses around here - they lift them up and put them on a lorry or a trailer - you might see half a house and then another half coming along. Dad only had half the pub - someone else probably bought the other half, but he had two bedrooms, a back and front veranda, a sitting room, a kitchen, a bathroom and a laundry.’⁷⁷

The government felt an obligation to recompense the returned soldiers for their contribution to the war and give them some form of financial security. Kay Grose recalls:

‘I can remember this - very few people know this, but when I first came to Robinvale and I was living in the hotel, the only place that people could have a committee meeting was in the commercial room of the hotel, a room set aside for such things. I think I’d been there about three or four months, heard that there was a meeting to try to have the next soldier settlement placed in Robinvale and I went to the meeting. There were these men sitting around, several of them returned soldiers, First World War, and three or four businessmen of Robinvale, and Herbert Cuttle Junior. When I walked in they were quite amazed and said, ‘Oh yes Miss McDonald, what can we do for you?’ I said ‘I’d love to be part of the meeting.’ Of course they didn’t think of women, particularly young women being interested in such a thing, but they were making plans to lobby to get the next Soldier’s Settlement in Robinvale. This was in late 1943 and they kept on working for this to happen. They were opposed by the Australian Dried Fruits Association who wanted the extension of the dried fruits area to be in Sunraysia - they didn’t want another place to be set up. It was really through Mr. Pethard who had a property here - he was the first to grow oranges and vines in an orchard in Robinvale and he was very keen to see Robinvale advance. He worked with Herbert Cuttle and he had the ear of the new Minister of Lands, Galvin. In 1944 or ‘45 the government changed – it had been Country Party government for yonks, but suddenly we had a Labour government, so here was the opportunity. Mr. Pethard was mates with the new Lands Department Minister – he used his lobbying power, as did Herbert Cuttle – this was where the new Soldier Settlement could be.’⁷⁸

In August 1946 at Robinvale, a committee was formed consisting of Councillor Herbert Cuttle, Mr Lloyd Arnott, Mr J. Haynes, J. Kennedy and Frank Parke. The committee represented the RSL (Euston) branch, the Dad’s Association and the people of Robinvale. The Committee prepared a case for Soldier Settlement and was able to convince the Victorian Government and the Soldier Settlement Commission that Robinvale should be developed for dried vine fruit.

Kay Grose continues:

‘When it was declared that Robinvale would be the next soldier settlement, you can imagine the excitement in Robinvale from the people that understood what that would mean.’⁷⁹

On 25th October 1946, the Soldier Settlement Scheme was announced and immediately, the (Victorian) State Rivers and Water Supply Commission began a program of construction to get the scheme operating before a change of government could reverse the decision. John Cain (Senior's) Labor Government was then in power.⁸⁰

Jack Forbes believes:

'I think the government felt an obligation to the men who had served Australia and they needed to compensate them in some way because there are soldier settlements all over Australia. There were dairy farmers, wheat farmers – whatever, so I think that was the reason behind it. There was vacant land as well, and I think they needed further production in our situation, for dried fruit. They could see the need to produce more dried fruit.'⁸¹

The criteria for selection as a Soldier Settler in Victoria were that applicants had to be male, under 45 years of age, possess a war service record, be married and have experience in that particular kind of farming.

Kay Grose observes:

'When the first soldier settlers were arriving, some of them brought their families. Most of the men who got the first lot of blocks didn't have their families with them, they lived in a compound where the pumping station is and they lived as they did in the Army – they had mess tents and all the rest of it. They did the clearing of the land and the preparation of all the blocks and then finally they were able to choose their own block – they were allocated a block.'⁸²

Bill McGinty explains:

'There was something like 248 fruit blocks averaging approximately 30 acres. They were then all dried fruit – all the fruit was dried on racks.'⁸³

Jack Forbes brings this fact to light:

'The interesting thing about that was those of us that had worked on our father's properties, which I had done before the war off and on, didn't qualify as being a soldier settler - you needed to have worked for someone outside the family. They didn't accept that your father was sufficient training for you. So I was recommended to do a short course on farm management at Dookie College, near Shepparton, which I did, and then I came back and I worked on a farm for two years for a First World War digger – he fought in France during the First World War. He gave me the good experience I needed. I had worked with my brother in Mildura on a property – we developed this property, I did the work on it, he was a mechanic and he supplied the funds. We were developing that until he decided to marry, which made it difficult for the two of us to operate on the one property – it was too small. At this stage I had met a certain person and it was obvious we weren't going to be able to operate on the one property, so I then applied for soldier settlement in Robinvale, and after about three applications, eventually I was successful.'⁸⁴

How did those who received a Soldier Settlement property react to the news that they had been successful? Jack Forbes recounts:

'I think the expression was – we won Tatts, and it was, because yes, we did get it free. For the first two years on the property we were given a wage - no holidays, no holiday pay, superannuation, £13 a week. We were given that money and we were expected to work on a communal basis. We didn't always work on our own

property; we often worked in a group putting in vines and posts, digging drains, pipelines, whatever. Once we'd put in the first two years on the property the third year was called the 'Bread & Butter Year' because we were cut back to £8 a week and we had to live on that, because that was the year we were producing our first crop and from then on we went from a lease arrangement to a Title arrangement. We were given the title to the land, but we still had to repay the Soldier Settlement Commission a certain amount every year, which was fairly minimal.'⁸⁵

For some city slickers, like Valerie Forbes, living in the country was no paradise:

'Everyone was absolutely amazed that I really enjoyed it, to come to the country, but it was quite a shock. For a start we had no electricity, no water connected, we were just in a little tin hut in the middle of 25 acres of bare wheat paddock. We managed very well, along with all the other settlers, they were all in the same boat, we didn't complain, we just got on with our job and helped our husbands as much as possible. When they were working on our property we made scones or sandwiches to feed them with, morning and afternoon teas. The only thing that worried me were the redback spiders. When I brought our new baby home we actually had to put the frame of the baby's basket in tins of water to stop the ants and redback spiders from climbing up into the basket. It was a bit of a worry – we had a net over the basket, which we dipped in water to keep our baby cool.'⁸⁶

Jack Forbes' allocation was the eleventh of the Soldier Settlement Commission at Robinvale.

'When we first came here we had a 1926 Rugby utility, which was fairly primitive and the roads were unmade, and in fact, we'd had quite heavy rains and the roads in places were impassable. Many times we had to leave the vehicle on one side of a duck pond and walk back home and eventually get the vehicle out. Valerie one time got bogged, as a very pregnant person too, and she had to be pulled out by a bulldozer.'⁸⁷

Valerie adds:

'I sat in the car for three and a half hours waiting for someone to come along: 'Please, please someone come along and pull me out of this bog hole.' We never went anywhere without our water boots in the car.'⁸⁸

The Soldier Settlement Commission imposed obligations on the settlers to grow grapes, as Jack Forbes indicates:

The Soldier Settlement Commission had told us originally that there would be ten acres of sultanas and five acres of Gordos and they were for raisins and dried sultanas. We didn't have any choice of what we could do with that fruit – that fruit had to be sold through the Robinvale Producer's Co-Op, which was a cooperative developed here just to process that fruit. Later on in the settlement there was a move against so many Gordos being planted because they found that there was not the great need for them as there was for the sultana. So they cut back the Gordo plantings to three acres and increased the sultanas to twelve acres, still getting that fifteen acres. When we came, which was in 1955/56 when they were allocating our area to be planted, we were told we were only getting two acres of Gordos and thirteen acres of sultanas – still the fifteen acres. Of course, the other five acres was taken up by the house and fruit drying racks, and then maybe there was still another two or three acres that you were allowed to plant whatever you desired. We planted plum trees on our property in that spare land. Unfortunately, the plums used to ripen about the same time as my wife decided to get pregnant and she found it very difficult carrying a fruit bag on front of her, so I pulled the plum trees out and

she never got pregnant anymore. To quote one of the settlers – he had vacant land and the Soldier Settlement Commission had supervisors going round to see that you were doing exactly as you were told to do – behave yourself, plant this; do that – whatever, and the Supervisor said to this fellow ‘What are you going to plant in your extra ground?’ He said, ‘I think I’ll plant some Aspros because you bastards are giving me big enough headaches.’⁸⁹

Jack Forbes stresses the importance of the bridge to fruit growers:

‘Very important to us because when we came here we thought maybe we should come down through Victoria to get to our property here. There was one of our settlers that lived two blocks from us and he lived in Red Cliffs, which, if you go to Mildura and cross the bridge you’re coming back toward Melbourne to get to this Red Cliffs settlement, which is also a soldier settlement area from the First World War. We thought it would be closer for him to go via Hattah to Red Cliffs. He said, ‘No it isn’t, it’s closer to go through NSW’. So, yes, it was absolutely vital for Robinvale that that bridge was there for transport to Mildura, and also most of our transport of our table grapes went to Sydney and a lot to Brisbane, so obviously we needed the bridge to get them into NSW and Queensland.’

Jenny Black’s husband George spent five and a half years in the Army and was given a block in the first allocation. He started on September 1st, 1947, as Jenny recollects:

‘In the beginning, some of the settler’s wives camped on the river because the houses weren’t made – they hadn’t been built by Clements Langford. There was a baby born on the river too - Daph Litchfield produced a baby on the river. We didn’t have a hospital. They were living in tents – I was living with my father still. We were married in 1950 and we had a house to move straight into, but George lived in the camp down at the Soldier Settlement, down towards the punts and he used to walk to visit me, he walked six miles.’⁹⁰

When we were married we moved into block 9B, which is straight down the Sea Lake Rd, it’s about a kilometre further south. You’ll find an old very disreputable pigger’s hut, which I wish would burn down, and that was our block. When we were first married we didn’t have electricity. George had a pressure lamp and if he wasn’t home before dark, I used to take it out into the middle of the backyard in case it blew up, because I was scared of it. We had a kerosene refrigerator and wood stoves and a copper, which we stoked with wood. We didn’t have a car for four years – the later allocations, they had better cars. We were very envious of them, but they’d had more years earning some money before they had a block. We had flow irrigation and our first tractor was a second-hand one, a Farm All-A, and it was a bit difficult to drive because it jumped all over the place, and one of my jobs was to help with the weeding – we’d weed with a plough thing and George always put on a backing off blade as well. I had four inches of error, all being right, and a tractor that didn’t track too well. He was walking along behind hanging on to the plough and pushing it along. It had to weave in and out between the posts and the little sticks of vines. I was driving the tractor – we did a lot of tractor driving, we drove everything.’⁹¹

In the book *Veterans and Vines*, Jenny writes:

Because of the haste in preparation and planting of blocks, the first allocation’s first harvest was very poor. Block 9B produced only six tons of dried fruit. George developed the broad based furrow irrigation shovel, which improved the distribution of water to the vines. Weather was all-important – frost destroyed young bunches and rain at the wrong time meant black spot, downy mildew and loss of grade with

drying fruit. For many years, local Italians picked our grapes – they were hard workers. Gradually the Italians bought and cultivated land for themselves. George and I enjoyed their early celebrations and danced the Tarantella enthusiastically.

One night, in a howling storm, George and I temporarily roofed our sixth rack with corrugated cement sheets. Block work was muscle-building, produced aching backs and I learned to drink beer. Until George died in 1986, with the exception of a small acreage of Gordos, which were sent to McWilliams Winery, we continued to produce dried fruit. In most years we averaged three tons or more per rack of dried fruits and had good crops.⁹²



Jenny Black on her Soldier Settlement farm, 1948

John Katis is a Swan Hill Councillor who lives at Robinvale:

'Robinvale had its ups and downs because Robinvale was a thriving little township because of the dry fruit industry that was in Robinvale because of the returned soldier settlements that were opened up here, but after a certain time in the middle of the 1970s the dried fruit seemed to disintegrate because of the cheap imports that were coming from Turkey and Greece, so our local Co-op, which was the receiving point of all the dried fruit that was grown here in Robinvale collapsed, closed down and two hundred-odd jobs were lost. Decentralization was talked about then, but it went the wrong way: we lost some of the government services that we had here in Robinvale. The government agencies virtually closed their doors, so Robinvale lost a lot of economic benefit that was coming out of government coffers. Our hospital virtually closed down, most of their services, so we had to go to Mildura. The only

thing that kept the community going I think was, because per capita I think we've got the biggest Aboriginal community in Victoria, and there's a lot of government money coming in to finance our Aboriginal community. After a while, the Italian and Greek communities that were in the dried fruit business invented the table grape industry themselves. With the new technology you can what we call 'blow up' the grapes, expand their size and you turn them into a bigger sized sultana, which is called Thompson Seedless, which is a very sought after grape. Of course new varieties came, vines a lot longer now with the plastic covers and the new trellising, V-Trellis and Slide Trellis, and so on. We've got huge cool rooms here and if the international or local markets aren't very strong we can hold the grapes for a long time in those cool rooms, so the industry picked up again and it's a multi-million dollar industry in Robinvale, and of course across the river into Euston.

The revival came again because the access off the Murray River was very close to Robinvale, and because Robinvale is one of the best situated and best soils in northern Victoria because our water table is something like 15 metres below the surface, whereas if you go towards Swan Hill and further down from Mildura, you'll find that their water table is very close to the surface. So really you're having a problem with salt, because it has a lot of salt content in that water table. So the Robinvale district is very sought-after country, so now we see big concerns coming to this district to buy a lot of the dry country and with the technology we have nowadays to use water in a very environmental way, we see big concerns being opened up and millions of dollars being spent.⁹³

The people

In the beginning, Aboriginal tribes survived admirably for thousands of years in what Europeans called the Riverina. Then in the 1840s, white settlers, almost exclusively from the British Isles and Ireland came to make their mark on the country. There was no discernible change in populations until after the First World War. Kay Grose remarks:

‘The interesting thing about Robinvale has been the waves of people that have come. There were Italian people here actually before the Second World War, not long before. Some of them definitely came as a result of having been prisoners of war in Australia and wanted to settle. This is a Mediterranean climate and very suited to what Italian people want. Around the same time as they were settling, quite a number of Dutch families came and a sprinkling of other Europeans, like Germans who came here and settled, and the Greeks, they came pretty well along with the second wave of Italians. We noticed that in our schools, because the children very often were children who were born in Italy, or were born out here to parents who were still speaking Italian to their children, and so the children came to school without the language. That was a struggle. It was quite difficult for some of (the Italians who had not become Australian citizens by the beginning of the Second World War) because some of the men were interned and this was really sad. Another thing that was sad was that there was some feeling of animosity to the Italian people because we had soldiers fighting in Northern Africa against Italians.’⁹⁴

John Katis remembers:

‘We came to Australia in 1956. We originated from the Peloponnese. We came by ship to Australia, took about 34 days, landed in Melbourne. Of course we went to Bonagilla (migrant camp) after that, as everybody did in those days. From there my father was sent to a town called Kingoonya, about 300km west of Port Augusta to work on the railways. We were there for two years to pay for our passage. After he did his time there we went to Melbourne, where there was a lot of work on construction, the city was growing then, and after that because, of course, we were in the horticulture business in Greece, there was opening of lands in Robinvale, so we moved there and I have been here since then.’⁹⁵

Jenny Black remember the Italians who worked on her property:

‘They were very good workers. My father had a lot of Italians out at Tol Tol, working on Oliveholme and he helped them migrate out here. He helped them with their application forms, helping them to get through all the bits and pieces required. In the picking time we were lucky, because it was a fairly dull season out at Oliveholme and so often we had pickers from there.’⁹⁶

Jack Forbes recalls migration from Eastern Europe - mainly Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia:

‘When we came here there was a lot of migration into Australia and a lot of the migrants were coming from the eastern European countries, and they would come up here and put the first of their lifestyle in Australia into picking grapes. They used to bring a train up from Melbourne full of these people, and they would arrive on the station here at midnight. The settlers would go in and they’d stand on the railway station and be allocated these men. Names of men were called out – ‘How many do you want? Five? Right, there you are, take this lot.’⁹⁷

Valerie Forbes adds:

‘A lot of these young men were only 18 year old and some of them were homeless, and they’d been on the boat to come to Australia. They hadn’t spoken to an Australian – they came straight to Robinvale from the boat onto the train and usually it was the settler’s wife who gave them their first meal, because there was very little food available from Melbourne to Robinvale and they were very grateful.’⁹⁸

Later, another wave of migrants arrived, as Kay Grose expresses:

‘Around 1980 came the wave of the Pacific Islanders – first of all Tongans, and one of first men that came to Robinvale, as a Pacific Islander, coming from Sydney, came over the bridge, just looking to see what Robinvale would be like – would this be the sort of place where he could get work? He had a couple of other men with him and as they came off the bridge somebody coming on gave them a wave, you know, the way country people do, and he said to himself ‘This is going to be the place – they’re friendly here.’ After this wave of Pacific Islanders, have come the Asian people, from Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand. We’re now a very multicultural society - the latest count is 48 nationalities in Robinvale.’⁹⁹

Education

Euston Public School was opened in 1865 by Mrs Nina Grant, its first teacher and her pupils numbered 4 boys and 13 girls. In 1868 Charles Morgan was appointed to the school and sent the following message to the National Council:

'I have the honour to report that I have arrived in Euston on the 25th ult. On reporting myself to the local Board. I was informed that the house formerly occupied by the teacher was roofless and there was no other place to be had. My allowance from the Board not being sufficient to pay for hotel charges, I lived in the schoolroom, a miserable barn-like building. The building is 20 feet by 30 feet with large cracks all around it and the windows are broken. Three rickety forms and a cracked bullock bell furnish the room'¹⁰⁰

In January 1925, the first school at Robinvale was opened at the Hall, a temporary arrangement. Len Arnott writes that the first teacher was an elderly lady by the name of Miss Anderson:

'Some of the boys who attended were a little lively. On three occasions Miss Anderson came up to mother to see if she could stem their noise. At this time we had a mouse plague and the boys would put a matchbox on the tail of a mouse, then another lad would ask Miss Anderson how to do something and as soon as the teacher got near, the lad would let the mouse go, and to the delight of all the children, she would jump on the seat of the desk. As you would guess, the teacher soon transferred and a young male teacher, Mr Croxford was sent.'¹⁰¹

Records from 1926 show that 44 pupils attended and consequently, a recommendation that a permanent school be built was accepted and the new school was completed in 1927.¹⁰²



Opening of Robinvale school, 1928

Val McGinty attended the school from 1938:

'Before the war, when I went to school I think there were roundabout 50 to 60 children going to our school. That was both primary and higher grades. It was all in one big room.'¹⁰³



Robinvale school, 1930s

Kay Grose completed her High School education in Melbourne:

'When I began teaching you began as a sort of apprentice teacher, called a Student Teacher. You went straight from your Matriculation year and you went straight into teaching, and you were teaching all the time under the supervision of the head teacher. You prepared lessons in writing and all the notes on your lessons had to be written and approved by your head teacher who also took you for classes in education after school and classes in penmanship, in handwriting, writing on a blackboard and all those sorts of things, so it was a real apprenticeship and then finally – you had to be 18 – you applied to be in Teacher's College.'¹⁰⁴

After finishing her training, Kay was posted to Robinvale:

'I came late one night on the long train journey from Melbourne – I think it was the 2nd February, 1943. When I arrived, I was greeted by the head teacher of the school and the Chairman of the School Committee, and they conveyed me and my baggage to Robinvale Hotel. It's quite dark and I'm looking out in the headlights of the car – just sand, rippling sand, like a seashore, right to the very door of the hotel where there was a pocket-handkerchief sized lawn at the front, and really it was very small. It was not much larger than a couple of dining tables – this lawn at the front. But I was amazed at the hotel - a two-storey hotel! Must be a big place – Robinvale. When I woke up in the morning and was able to look out the window – I was on the first floor of the hotel, all I could see was just red soil. We were in the middle of a drought and many roads all running to the hotel, or rather I should say tracks, and it was almost as if the hotel was the centre of a web. The lady who was the proprietor of the hotel pointed out to me from the balcony where the school was and I walked to the school that morning over rippling sand. I remember arriving at the school gate and discovering that the school gate was perpetually open. Indeed, having a gate was

unnecessary, because you could step over the fence. The sand had drifted from the other side of the track and had almost obscured the fence, there was just about 30 centimetres of fence above the sand. The school was about 17 years old by that time – they had planted trees and brought water from the river on a billycart with kerosene tins of water and watered the trees, I was told later and those trees were established there. So the children did actually have shade, as well as the Boobyalla hedge shade. There were not many children – the population of the school was 45 – that was the total school from nine grades, from the little preparatory class, right through to year eight, because in those days primary schools included up to year eight. I taught the four younger grades and the head teachers took the four older grades and generally supervised the school.¹⁰⁵

‘The head teacher and I, with our 45, just sort of managed to fit in this one long building with just one room, with a curtain down the middle to divide the seniors from the juniors – that was all our school was. We didn’t have access to the great amount of paper and crayons and things like that because paper was quite expensive. Children still used little blackboards – we weren’t using slates. Generally you grouped your years three and four together and taught them much the same work, and you put five and six together, seven and eight together. The little ones you had to separate a bit more because they had to be started with their letters, and their reading and counting. We used monitors – older children would go and supervise those little ones – hear the little ones read while I was teaching something. This might seem that the children’s education would be neglected, but it didn’t work out that way, because it reinforced their own learning to go and supervise the younger ones. You made sure that no monitor spent too much of their school time monitoring.’¹⁰⁶

As Robinvale grew, with the commencement of the Soldier Settlement Scheme, so did the students at the school:

‘We had, say, on a Monday morning three new students. Well, we fitted them in OK, and then the next Monday morning we might have six. We got to the stage where we didn’t have enough desks, we had them sitting three at a desk, we had to get desks from some of the closed schools around the Mallee and we had some of the children actually having their classes in the shelter shed. Of course there was a desperate call then for buildings to be brought in. Some of the schools that were no longer used out in the Mallee were brought in to our school ground. The time came when the school ground became so overcrowded with buildings that there was hardly enough room for anyone to play, and more teachers had to be got too. So it was decided that a new school ground was needed, and so the new school was built. It was all very exciting, everything happened and was bursting at the seams.’¹⁰⁷

Beryl Arnott was also a teacher at the school. She departed for Robinvale one summer morning in 1952:

‘I left Melbourne full of enthusiasm at 7.30 in the morning the day before school was due to start with all my worldly possessions in a suitcase and travelled up through Bendigo and then had to catch another train to Korong Vale, then changed at Korong Vale to this tiny one-carriage electric motor train. Chuggidy chug, all the way up through the Mallee and I had never been north of Mt Macedon in my life. It was 108 degrees that afternoon – I’ll never forget how hot it was, and I’d never seen the Mallee and here’s all these Mallee trees, and under each tree there were rabbits packed tight in the shade, making use of every bit of shade they could catch. So all the way up to Manangatang, where we had to get out and have something to eat and

by that time the sun was setting. This was February, it would have been about 7.30 or 8pm, so off we went again in the night. Finally we pulled up at this place and here on the platform, ready to greet us was a whole group of other girls: 'Oh you must be the ones from Melbourne, we've got our hostel to sleep in', because there were so many young teachers coming at once that they'd made a hostel for us. There was nothing but red sand as far as you could see, so we went along this track and into this new sort of concrete brick building, which was an ice-works. It was so lovely and cool in there. Then we went up the street a little bit further into the hostel. Well, it was an empty shell – they hadn't finished it. The head teacher had been rushing round all afternoon. They had put in the bedrooms a bed with a wire mattress and that was it. He'd been rushing round and he'd found a mattress each for us and a pillow each for us, and that was it, and so I just died on this pillow.¹⁰⁸

'In the morning I woke up, there were no curtains on the window and this red hot sun was streaming through the window on to me and I thought, 'Oh gee, I have to get up', and then I heard some kids talking. I looked out the window and here were some children playing underneath my bedroom window in the dirt, and I thought, 'Oh, I've got to get up and teach them.' There were these little bush schools all lined up in rows and there was a class in each bush school and there was nothing but red dust. The head teacher said, 'Who wants to teach which grade?' We didn't know each other, we knew no one, so he said, 'All right I'll settle it – prep 1,2,3,4,5,6 all line up.' I got grade one, which was all right, because I was infant-trained. At the end of this day – it was so hot in this little timber room with no glass windows and there was nothing in that classroom except desks. There was a box of chalk in the cupboard. There wasn't *anything* but this sea of faces looking at me, but the kids were great and they brought me grapes and their storybooks along, thank goodness. By the afternoon you couldn't sit in there any longer, so I took them out under the shade of the pine tree and sat them all in the dirt and read stories to them, and as I was reading stories the sky started getting darker and darker and this great cloud of red dust started blowing up. I'm looking at the dust and I'm looking at the storybook and one of the kids says to me, 'It's all right Miss, it's only a dust storm.' So I had to take them in and the dust storm raged around. Then the bell went and they could go home – by this time the dust had subsided a bit and the buses came to take them home. That was my first day in Robinvale.¹⁰⁹

However, the Victorian Department of Education did not quite abandon their remote area teachers:

'I remember – we'd been there months and this huge wooden box arrived, about the size of this table. And we thought *oh*, this will be the blankets, sheets and the pillows and all that stuff - we were still using the borrowed stuff from around the town. We opened up the lid of this crate and the first thing we pulled from this crate was an axe, and the second thing was a spade and the third thing was a set of scales that weighed 28 pounds. I don't know what they were for. Only curtains for the windows in the crate were of any use to us.¹¹⁰

Medical services

When Kay Grose came to Robinvale, there was as yet no resident doctor. In 1933, a Bush Nursing Society had been formed at Euston, at which Sister Goldsbro was the resident bush nurse. On foot and later by pony, the sister visited the sick, delivered babies and provided the only medical care.¹¹¹ Kay Grose recalls:

‘We all did home nursing and first aid training, and just as well, because there was no resident doctor here – the bush nurse was resident in Euston and the only way she could get here was over the bridge. About eighteen months after we were married, my husband became very ill with influenza. I was very alarmed about him, because I believed that he had not just bronchitis, I believed he had pneumonia. By this time I had got my licence to drive, using our four-ton truck because we didn’t have a car and I drove to Euston to get Sister Goldsbro to come to see my husband, hoping that she would be able to prescribe some antibiotics. The only antibiotics at the time of the war were what were called M&B tablets – they were some sulphur drug. When I got there, to my dismay Sister wasn’t there – I had forgotten that she was on leave and there was a very old sister relieving. I said to her, ‘Will you come and see my husband, I think he’ll die if he’s not given some treatment – he’s too sick for me to bundle him up into the truck and drive him to Mildura’ – to drive to Mildura was about a two-hour trip, because the road was not sealed – it was a dreadful road to Mildura back then, and nobody else had petrol – you had to have petrol tickets to be able to put petrol in your car. I had to plead with this sister ‘Please come’. ‘No, she said, I wouldn’t go over that bridge in a truck.’ I had to bully her eventually and say, ‘Well if you won’t come, give me the antibiotic tablets for my husband, otherwise I’ll have to hold you responsible for his death, because I think he’ll die without help.’ Eventually she gave in and gave me the tablets and told me how to administer them, so I drove home and of course gave them to him. He was still very sick. Two days later he seemed to be turning the corner and two or three days later there was a knock at the door and Sister Goldsbro comes in. She had got back from her holiday and the first thing she did was to come. She walked from Euston, came over the bridge and came to my door and she agreed with me that my husband would have died.’¹¹²

Robinvale got its first resident doctor, Dr. McLennan in 1946 and the same year the first pharmacy also opened its doors. Jean Wilson was the pharmacist’s wife:

‘After we married and we had our first child, I had very bad arthritis and the doctor suggested I get to a warmer climate. One of the drug firms that we used to deal with had mentioned that there was an opening up here for a pharmacy. The settlement here had just started after the war and there was nothing here in the way of medical supplies, and so we opened the pharmacy here in 1946. We were the first pharmacy in the town. Most of the people that were given fruit blocks were returned soldiers and they were all young people starting families. There were lots and lots of babies and they needed medical care. My husband was also in great demand as a Vet. He had always wanted to do Veterinary Science, but went on with pharmacy instead. He was fond of animals too, so he used to be called on quite often to treat animals as well as humans. In our prescription book, going through it, there’d be a Toby Smith, and Toby Smith could easily be a dog or a cat that had been treated. There was a doctor here who came about the same time as we did, but he also served Manangatang and he used to spend his time between the two places, so quite often we would have to try and fill in for him. I remember when they were building the ice-works here – a

pipe broke or something, and chemicals were splashed around and three of the men got these chemicals in their eyes, and it was a Saturday, they were working overtime. My husband was playing golf and the doctor was out of town, so I had these three men on our front lawn, and it was just a day or so before I had read an article in the paper that a similar thing had happened somewhere else and they had treated these fellows' eyes with Bicarbonate of Soda, made into a weak solution. So there I was, bathing the eyes of these three men. My children said: 'Oh that was terrific, Mum.'¹¹³

Jean and her husband had some difficulty in getting hold of drugs to treat their patients:

'The train only came once a week and all goods had to be ordered from Melbourne and they came up by train. So if you were running short of anything it was difficult. Sometimes a patient would have to wait a week. We have a large shed in our garden here, which we built so that we could always double up on the things we ordered, so there was rarely a problem unless it was something unusual.'¹¹⁴

In time, Robinvale built a hospital, which was opened with great ceremony in 1957, followed by a Baby Health Centre. Ann Gill is a qualified nurse who came to Robinvale in 1985:

'When I first came here we still had midwifery and theatre and we always had a lot of outpatients, particularly in the picking season. There were people coming and going all the time. They'd got up to about 30 babies when I first came here. We always had 'mids' in. I'm not a midwife, but I did work a little bit in theatre. I'm not fond of theatre. We did quite a few operations. Dr Cleary was very good, but that had all petered out by the time I finished. Mildura took over the hospital and they took midwifery, theatre and everything from it.'¹¹⁵

Ann comments on the hospital's facilities:

'They built the new nursing home, which was very nice, but it only took 14 patients, and then about six years ago they built a new hospital as well and they incorporated the nursing home into that, but they made it into single rooms, most of it, more bathrooms and things like that. Then recently they put in a new X-Ray Department. There is plenty of auxiliary staff. – they've got speech therapists, physios, occupational therapists, social workers. They've got almost everybody, but they're shared, it's a community thing and they go to Balranald, Wentworth, Manangatang and I think Sea Lake, some of them, as well.'¹¹⁶

'The hospital on the whole is very good and certainly their auxiliary people – there's a good variety there. The hospital itself, I think, needs to have more than what they've got. They've got palliative care and they've got an emergency and they've got everything else, but too many people have to be sent away and it shouldn't be that way with the size of the town. There are not enough beds – you're sent away for almost everything, if you're sick enough you go. Ten years ago that wouldn't have happened, they would have been still at the hospital here.'¹¹⁷

Asked whether the hospital was capable of removing an appendix, Ann replied:

'No, they've closed the theatre – they've made the theatre into a laundry. They built the new theatre since I've been here, probably 15 years ago and then, when Mildura took over, we didn't have an anaesthetist and we couldn't have theatre and when the new hospital was built it was made into a laundry. We still had the labour ward and a midwifery set up, so that if somebody came in as an emergency, they could still actually deliver them and then send them to Mildura, but now that's gone too. It would only be outpatients at the hospital and the ambulance now. I think possibly country hospitals have lost midwifery because there are not enough midwives and

they don't update often enough. People are not going to do midwifery if they're not going to get the jobs, are they? They're probably contracted to stay here for so long, I don't know, but that is the problem.¹¹⁸

Bill McGinty adds:

'The place grew and there was a shortage of doctors and about seven or eight years ago they were saying, it is impossible to get doctors, so I saw it as a challenge. So I rang Dublin in Ireland and asked if there was any publication that I could put an ad in, which I did. There was a monthly medical journal, so I put an ad in it for doctors and I got four replies. One fellow replied on the back of an envelope, so I rang him and he was drunk, and I rang another young fellow, about 35, and he was interested in coming to Australia because he had been to Australia before, in Queensland, but he had to go back again because he couldn't stay because of the visa. I rang him and got him to come over to Robinvale and spend a week with us to have a look at the place, which he did. He liked the place, so then the fun started because you couldn't get foreign doctors into Australia, it was almost an impossibility. So I fought the bureaucrats and won. I got him out here within 12 months – cost me a lot of money, but I proved the point. I got the doctor here, set him up in the hostel, we built a clinic there and he was there for over two years, but he just couldn't hit it with the hospital, so he decided this is not good enough for me and he left. So I then contacted a doctor up the Gold Coast and I got him down, and he was here for three and a half years – he left to return to the Gold Coast and hopefully, I might have another doctor very shortly.¹¹⁹

Bill also created the impetus to have a hostel for the aged established in Robinvale:

'I fought for many years for it and we eventually built 30 units, totally free of debt, and we had to make a decision whether to continue with it ourselves or hand it over to the hospital to operate, because it got too big for our committee, and we handed over \$630,000 when we handed it over to them. It's possibly one of the best projects ever done in this town and free of debt all the way through.¹²⁰

Commerce and transport

At the very beginning of settlement, sheep was the predominant industry on the Murray River and wool was its main product. Mr Arthur Taylor, in Hazel Porter's book *The Story of Euston* recounts:

'Bullock teams, with myself as one of the drivers, pulled thirteen tons of logs at a time. From eighteen to twenty-two bullocks comprised a team in those days. These teams took a month to do the 300-mile trip from Marnford to Euston. Raw wool was brought in bales, scoured at Euston, taken up river to Echuca and thence carried by train to Melbourne. Twelve to seventeen horses comprised a horse team. No reins were used, the drivers just talked to the horses, same as bullocks. In early Euston, mobs of wild horses, or brumbies as they were called roamed the countryside ad lib, recalling to mind Mr. H.G. Leslie, a great horseman in his day. Fences were unknown, of course and the remains of the original yards still stand, reminiscent of 'breaking in'. Reminiscent of early Euston, too, are the coaching days, when horses were changed at Euston on the route from Broken Hill to Wentworth and Swan Hill. River boats plied briskly to and from Euston in the early days and paddle steamers pulled in at the billabong across from Euston Station, fifteen to twenty boats doing original service, travelling day and night.'

As Euston became a busy port on the Murray, new industries sprang up:

'Euston's eucalyptus factory once employed close to 65 men and was known as the Bossito's Parrot Brand Eucalyptus Factory. Young mallee leaves were stripped from twigs and loaded into vats suspended on hooks from the roof and the distilled eucalyptus was sent away in big drums to Antwerp and elsewhere. It took 24 hours to steam a vat and pitchforks with four prongs two feet long were used to toss these heaps of leaves into the vats and during the process it was not uncommon to see snakes, goannas shellbacks and lizards thrown into the vats, along with the leaves. In the furnacing they were burned completely away. Evidently, the consumer of the oil were none the wiser as it seemed to have no detrimental effects.'¹²¹

When the railway and road transport came to Euston, the river trade declined, and so did Euston itself. Len Arnott points out:

'By the time the lock was built the river trade had virtually finished, because we had the bridge here and the road and rail transport. So even people like Sir Sydney Kidman way up in Queensland, he loaded cattle from Robinvale on the railway to go to the markets in Melbourne. That's actually recorded, so the railways were in full use by then. Robinvale today is much bigger than Euston. Euston had about 50 houses – when you drive around Euston there's about three of the old original houses still there. After the war the Italians started farming that area between the bridge and Euston and that area is mainly under grapes today – that was settled to a large degree by Italians. After the war some people found they could build and live cheaper in Euston, even though they might work in Robinvale, and the Euston Club has got to take a lot of the benefit. People with a lot of initiative started the Euston Club. That, of course gave Euston a great boost.'¹²²

Jenny Black writes about transport in Euston's early days:

'In 1861, Archibald McDonald ran a weekly mail passenger coach service from Swan Hill to Euston and Balranald. This coach service continued until made redundant by

the motorcar. I have read that coach journeys could be so rough that some travellers thought that the return journey by foot would be preferable! Coach drivers were known as ‘whips’ because they tried to ensure that the horses went at a gallop, irrespective of obstacles. In the summer, coach travel meant heat and choking dust – in winter, water could wash into the coach. Cobb & Co’s motto was ‘Get through or bust’, but however uncomfortable, the coach runs did provide a link with civilisation.’¹²³

As Euston, declined, Robinvale grew, but even in 1946, 22 years after its establishment, there was much to do, as Jean Wilson recalls:

‘There was very little here. The Arnotts had a shop, which was clothing (and drapery). There was one butcher and a baker and an Italian that grew vegetables and sold them in the street during the week. I can’t remember his name. There was a café, but very little else. Ours was a tiny little pharmacy back off the main street. There was a very small school and this street there was a little Post Office, which used to be across the railway line and had been moved just when we came here, moved to the corner where the present Post Office is, but it was just a little shack. In this street – George St, there were three houses. We bought land across the street here – it was very difficult to get anything built, because everything was in short supply after the war and they were busy building all their houses on their fruit blocks. So it was very difficult to get any building done.’¹²⁴

Bill McGinty describes his first house, built after the war:

‘Our first house was in Latje Rd and I can remember pulling the bank manager up in Perrin Street - I didn’t worry about going to his bank and said, ‘I want to borrow one hundred and thirty five pounds’ because that’s what the timber was going to cost and he said, ‘Money is hard to get’ and I said ‘Well, I just want one hundred and thirty five pounds’. I eventually got it, and that’s how we started - we built it bit by bit - two rooms at first, and we only lined the two rooms, which we lived in. We had a kitchen and a bedroom done, and between the studs where you put the flooring on, the bath sat in between that, with a bucket under it and you would carry in the water from the copper and fill your bath and then carry it out after you’d had your bath, sitting in an unlined room between these rails. The bath fitted nicely in there - it was a great spot for it. But we were quite happy - we had a stove that you could open up in winter and you’d sit around that with a rug around you and it was quite warm. We didn’t have any under floor heating like we’ve got today, but we did well.’¹²⁵

The Cuttles seemed to own most of the town, as Val McGinty points out:

‘When I worked for Mr Herbert Cuttle, in Herbert St. he had a big building and in the building he had hardware, electrical, all the growers’ products, two different fuel agents, Mobil and another one, and he had radio. On the side of that he had the office and that’s where I worked, and he had immigration, naturalization, a tourist bureau and three different insurance agencies. Up the street a little further there is a timber yard, and further up was a garage. He also sold cars and tractors and all the implements for the first settlement. Up further he had a plumbing department, made rainwater tanks and I was his bookkeeper. He had one partner that I know of – Royston Siddons, who had finance in the business. He was Sidchrome spanners. His accountant from Melbourne was the secretary of nineteen big companies all over the world and he used to come up once a fortnight and audit my books.’¹²⁶

In time, as Robinvale grew, the aspirations of its citizens were fulfilled.

The flood of 1956

The Murray River periodically breaks its banks and major floods occurred in 1917 and 1931, when the river rose to a height of ten and a half metres. Then the flood of 1956 struck. Jenny Black recalls:

'It rained for a fortnight. I had two fires going non-stop drying clothes, I had a baby and I had a toddler, and I had my father and George both getting wet. It was a great time, because I think they felt they were fighting a war again. They filled endless sandbags, they always seemed to be called out; they saved the punts, built great walls around the punts, which provided our water for the irrigation. Robinvale was flooded up as far as the hotel and the Post Office, because although we've got a high riverbank, it came in from behind on the lower parts. Now we have a levy bank down past the flats. My aunt was living over at Euston Station and she actually was cut off – their family came to town by rowboat, or motorboat if they wanted something to eat from Robinvale. But one night George was called over to Euston Station because the floodwaters were threatening them, and so they went across there – he was away all night, but they did save the Euston Station itself from being flooded.'¹²⁷

Kay Grose remembers:

'They realized it was coming up over the bank, so they started sandbagging down on the flats. They began building up the levy bank – they had trucks and bulldozers and by this time, after the war, bulldozers had become a little more common. They were sandbagging the top of the levy bank all the time, and as the water rose, the sandbags were put up higher. By then all the local men were working on it – everybody had to down tools from whatever job, except perhaps the grocery shop and so on, because people still had to get stores. The first worry about the flood was down on the flats, but then it became evident that it was coming up around the bridge too, and the area where Mr. McGinty lives now. So the levy bank had to be continued right around – it had to be started on the other side because the water spreads out on the NSW side much quicker than this side of the river. So they were starting to make levy banks all the way from about five miles out of Euston to stop the water from crossing the road.'¹²⁸

Bill McGinty also took part:

'We spent hours and hours and hours day and night banking properties, banking roads with sandbags. We were sick of looking at sandbags - that's all we'd do, fill these sandbags; cart them to tractors and trailers that were going all the time and building levy banks to protect the town on this lower area. Everyone was very busy. The Euston hotel was almost under water, the Church went under water at Euston, and it probably had three or four feet of water in it. But we saved the hotel by putting sandbags around it – couldn't get to the cemetery because there was a mile of water to cross, so no one had to die in that time.'¹²⁹

There is one recorded fatality as a result of the flood. Bill McGinty recounts:

'I can remember out the Mildura Rd, where the flood waters broke through at night time, and my brother and this young fellow came into Euston, and my brother stayed and he went back and he nosedived, there was a 30 feet wide strip, and he nosedived into the water with the car, the car took off and landed nose first. It threw the

engine out of the car, there was so much force. He was washed on to a tree and he sat on a branch in the tree all night, and he was frozen. My uncle and I went out next morning to have a look around and here we spotted him in the tree. We contacted the police to come out with a boat and get him. I said, 'I will swim out' because the water was raging, all you had to do was jump in the water and I could swim like a fish – 'I'll jump out and I'll hold him', because he was frozen, you know – weather like this. The policeman wouldn't allow me to do it, so he let the boat out and it hit the tree, he fell off and drowned. He was only about 18. But when the boat hit the tree he just fell off into the water, because he was absolutely frozen. Now all they had to do was put a rope around me, let me go out and I could have saved him, but he wouldn't let me do it.'¹³⁰

'Floods are just part of life. The water just went back. It took a while to settle down again, but everyone accepted that. It was truly magnificent with all this floodwater, and you'd get out with a boat and just go cruising around the river. It was just magnificent because you could go for miles. The bird life was tremendous, fish – oh, as much fish as you want.'¹³¹

Indigenous perspectives

Aboriginal Australians have lived and hunted on the banks of the Murray River since time immemorial, evidenced by the remains of camping and burial grounds and middens. Hazel Porter, in her book *The Story of Euston* (1949) writes that Euston Station itself was built on Aboriginal burial grounds:

'Its orange groves and rose gardens cover the remains of early blacks that, buried head to foot in the sand, are still being uncovered by wind and time today. Recent diggings and up-turnings of pieces of bones and skulls have proven this fact. I have even handled a few myself! A similar burial ground at Robin Vale opposite, on the Victorian side of the river, also supports this theory. And there is another at Hattah, around the Lake Hattah district. Oh yes, the bones are there alright.'¹³²

Relations between indigenous inhabitants and white settlers during the 19th century do not seem to have been generally amicable. Although friendly Aborigines rescued the explorer Charles Sturt south of Euston, near 'Ninety Mile Bend', Sir Thomas Mitchell chose Mt Dispersion, 33 km from Euston as the site to ambush and murder seven aborigines on 20th May 1836 before continuing on to Swan Hill and Portland, so James Hickey in his book 'Fifty Years of Progress- Robinvale 1924-1974' writes.¹³³ These events still resonate in the consciousness of the Murray River people today.

Kay Grose concurs:

'As far as we can tell, there were friendly enough relationships, but we can't be sure about that. We know what Morey says about how he came and settled on the NSW side and how he had the Aboriginal men working with him. In his papers that he delivered in the late 1800s, I think, to a society in Sydney - he says that on one occasion the Aboriginal people did break into his camp and steal flour and stuff like that, and how he, and the men he had with him pursued the Aborigines and got most of their stores back. He doesn't say if they shot anyone, but I think they shot at people and frightened them. Had he shot anyone, he wouldn't admit it, I think, would he?'¹³⁴

'Apparently from about just before the First World War until after the Second World War, the indigenous people were not living here. After I was married, and my husband was doing carrying work at that time with a truck, he would tell me from time to time that he had found some Aboriginal people out in firewood camps on the bends of the river. I was very interested in that, but we didn't ever see them. When the war was over and the soldier settlement began, the Aboriginal people started moving in here. They came here to work, and they did work.'¹³⁵

Darcy Pettit spent most of his life around Euston and Robinvale. According to Darcy:

'The original people from here were the Tati Tati people. They were mostly based around from Lake Benanee through to Euston, right through to this part of the country. The original mob was a breakaway mob from the Wiradjuri tribe in NSW and then you had the Latji Latji people, but they were more Kulkynne way, further down the river, and Kulkynne Forest National Park. I've been brought up in this area, I've been here about 48 years now, I'm 56 now. I've spent pretty much most of my life in and around Robinvale and Euston, but as far as I know, and from my teachings from the old people these smaller clans were a breakaway clan from the Wiradjuri people.'

Euston was set up originally – was named – one of the selections for the Capital State of Australia, which would have been the A.C.T. Euston was a part of that, probably before Robinvale was born, and then Robinvale got going, but in the early days when the squatters moved in and started taking the land, and with the introduction of smallpox up and down through the river tribes, and the strongest ones of course, the runners, ran with a message to the next tribe and little did they know they were carrying smallpox with them, and that's the way it spread up through the river and killed them in masses of thousands and thousands, along with a lot of massacres and gun battles – spears against guns, it just doesn't work.'¹³⁶

'The Aborigines had never seen another human being, apart from their own colour, and all of a sudden you've got these white people that come in boats. The original boat people were the European people – of course the Aboriginal people were very curious and wanted to learn knowledge from them, because an Aboriginal person is very, very knowledgeable and wants to learn by experience and to pass his message on by oral history and his trees, his river.'¹³⁷

'There were a lot of battles that took place. There was a major one at Mt Dispersion - it actually took place on the Victorian side of the river. It's all been acknowledged now. In the early days that's what happened to the original people. The Tati Tati people and the Latji Latji people were put together on a little old reserve at Kulkynne Station, which wasn't a National Park back in those days, it was a station. There was another place called Mornpool down that area. There was one girl that got away from the poison flour and the massacres and I tracked her as far as St Arnaud, and some white people took her in and she died a very old lady, but she was the last descendant of the Tati Tati people, the original people from here.'¹³⁸

'We originally came from deep up in Wiradjuri country in a place called Ilson. I started school there at about a six year old. Apparently they told me I wouldn't wear clothes to school, so I went to school in nithtikookie, which means naked. The first time I left home I was nine year old and I went to Balranald. I lived on Greendale Station with my old uncle and he was a blind man, and he was getting old and his stepfather, old Tom Pearce, and that's old Grandfather Tom, he was my first major teacher in my cultural teaching. They happened to be two blind men and I was nine year old out at bush, living with two blind men. They could not see a thing, but they knew everything, every turn, every bush and every different smell and where the 'roos would be. We'd come over a hill and they'd say 'Stop the cart here boy and we'll get out and walk.' I didn't even have to hold their hand – they just walked like normal people, but they couldn't see anything, but within their spirit they could see, and they showed me how the 'roos used to fight over territory and where we'd get a feed, back in those days, with guns and things. I hunted with a pack of dogs, so I had between 10 and 15 dogs. Of course we'd get enough 'roos to feed ourselves and enough to feed the dogs as well. I used to always lose a dog or two now and then – the 'roos would drown them in the dam, but we always had an old bitch somewhere and you could take her into town in the horse and cart and the town dogs used to follow us out, and the mission dogs used to follow us out, so we always had plenty of dogs on hand to do the hunting for us.'¹³⁹

According to Darcy, the local Aboriginal tribes lived right along the river:

'When I first came here – and all the other places I've lived, it was mostly old tin huts along the rivers before the mission was built, before they transitionalized into towns. When I came here all those years ago there were a lot of white people camped along the rivers too, and I suppose they had better huts than we had, but most of our

material came from whatever we could pick up from the tip, and different people moving out of their huts – a lot of it just old bags and tin, but prior to that there was the last Mi Mi on Bumbang Island. That's why it's very sacred to us, the last Mi Mi, which is a shelter for a family and the framework was still there. I've got photos of it.'¹⁴⁰

Asked how the tribes adapted to the cold winters, Darcy assures:

'There was possum skin rugs, kangaroo skin rugs, there was all sorts of plant life. There was always a good fire going. It was very, very warm in the winter season if you know what you're doing and you've actually got a sandbar where you can dig the sand out and light a few leaves up just to warm the sand and lie in there for the night and cover yourself up with sand. It's like having two or three doonas over you, but it all just boiled down to commonsense, really. You had to adapt to whatever your needs were and the land itself, our mother, it provided for us, and it still does today.'¹⁴¹

In times of drought, the local tribes survived by moving to fresh hunting grounds:

'The walkabouts were more survival techniques, spiritual techniques, and they had to go into certain areas at certain times of the year. There were bigger clans along the rivers than what there would have been in the desert country, so they could sustain physical life with the wildlife and animals and the plant life and pay homage to the spiritual life, So everything revolved around the two things, the spiritual and the physical side of us.'¹⁴² The river wasn't a border in those days. Tribal boundaries and totem boundaries cut across the river – they didn't actually get to the river and say: 'Well, this is it.' Their tribal boundaries covered both sides of the river.'¹⁴³

Darcy offered this explanation on how one could cross the river safely into another tribe's territory:

'The old cockatoo, he's a great storyteller. His certain white feather in his wing gave you the right of way to passage through another man's country. If you didn't carry that feather you had no right of way, therefore you had to go back and earn the right to travel through another man's country. You didn't get that cockatoo by yourself – the feather was marked – only the traditional elders knew and the mark was minute, but if you didn't carry that mark then they knew you were lying, you didn't have right of way. The feather was mainly worn in your hair, round about the temple part.'¹⁴⁴

Darcy has early memories of the bridge that links Euston and Robinvale:

'My first memory of it was when I was about nine, crossing the old wooden bridge in a horse and cart with the two old blind men and I'm sitting up there driving it. We came over from Balranald – took us a week or so, setting a few traps and feeding a few other horses that we had. In those days trucks used to pass each other on it, but now it's down to a single lane bridge and it's just about had it.'¹⁴⁵

What of the relations between white and black on the river today? Len Arnott gives his point of view:

'On the whole the Aboriginals in Robinvale today are a pretty respected part of the community. Coming back to the area opposite the Aboriginal Co-op, when it was first built there was some criticism and I'd be the first to admit I'm one that was a bit critical of the amount of money that was spent in one complex over there. But now you've got education, health, a community centre and the Aboriginals maintain it themselves, and in actual fact I think it was the best thing that ever happened. Give

them something that they can have a pride in, it's their part of Robinvale, and it's been good.'¹⁴⁶

Kay Grose adds:

'The first Aboriginal child I taught, I think was in 1949 or 1950 and I can remember clearly how delighted I was – he was a delightful kid. He came in at year four and we were friends all his life. Sadly he died as a man of about 55 years or less - his name was Noel Sampson. I tried to get him to tell me anything of his Aboriginal culture and he occasionally would tell little stories that his mother had told him. For instance, he talked about the little black and white willy wagtails and how his mother didn't like those birds because they were tell-tales. They carried gossip from place to place and they also carried bad news. She believed too, that the crested pigeons were a signal of death if they came into your camp – they had almost a mooing sound – that a relation of yours had died. She quite firmly believed that and would say, yes, and the next day or the next week we heard that so and so had died.'¹⁴⁷

The Historical Society

Euston and Robinvale have an active Historical Society. Kay Grose explains how it evolved:

'The Historical Society came into being in the year that I retired and it was just a little group of people that met almost casually and said, 'You know, there's some wonderful stories around Robinvale of what was in times gone by and we haven't got it written down, except in *The First Fifty Years* - we need to be able to capture these stories before these people die.' So this is how it began, with just a little chat group, almost. We had no proper constitution or aims or goals or anything like that set up. We'd meet, say, once a month and have speakers come, preferably an older person who had a story to tell. So we started off in 1982 with no resources to record, or at least we weren't adept at using those things, so notes were taken of what people were talking about. I said: 'Do you think somebody could take this exercise book - that is the old minute book - and extrapolate all the notes from Bill Peart's story, Mrs Conn's story, Mrs Berrett's story and so on?' Our Secretary-Treasurer offered to take them home and do that and it grew - we could see the points of research that we needed to do.'¹⁴⁸

The 50th Anniversary celebrations of the founding of Robinvale in 1974 was one of the biggest events in the history of the town. Kay Grose was again much involved:

'The 50th anniversary of Robinvale largely came about because I agitated for it. By that time, I'd started to become very interested in the local history and people would say 'Were you born here?' – 'No, I wasn't born here.' We came to Robinvale's 50th year and I said, 'We ought to have a celebration, a 'Back to Robinvale' and finally Mr. Jack Harris, who lived here said, 'We'll call a meeting'. I can remember the open-air meeting down on the recreation ground. We got a small group together that decided that, yes we'd go ahead and make a celebration, and it just grew like topsy. We worked very hard to get that book together called *The First Fifty Years*. There was just Len Arnott and myself and the Anglican minister of the time, who were the editors of that. It was a great event in Robinvale. I recall the late night sessions we had editing the book and getting it typed, and then finally we set up the printer in Robinvale, Sunnyland Press – they printed our book. I can remember the books arriving and how thrilled I was and on the great day of the 50th anniversary – and by this time I knew that a parade was going to be on and I knew that floats were being prepared. You can't believe that it's really going to be a success. I thought oh, but will people really come, arrive and celebrate? I was sitting in Perrin St, which was barricaded off, ready for the procession and I had a table pretty well in the middle of the street, with the books for sale. I believe someone has a photograph somewhere of me sitting in the middle of Perrin St. I can remember selling the books and suddenly someone says, 'Kay, move!' and they've clutched my chair and my table and the pile of books and moved me, and I heard our own Highland Pipe Band start. I was so – 'oh, the parade's starting', and I looked up and saw all the people that were lined up for the procession and I just burst into tears. I was so excited, I was so relieved, I couldn't really believe that at last it had happened. It was a wonderful day and the parade was everything I would have wished it to have been. It was a good day from the weather point of view. We had a Ball down in the we didn't have a building large enough to have a Ball in. The Bannerton silo had just built a huge shed down there with a cement floor – they prepared the cement floor so it would be shiny enough to dance on and we had a ball down there that night.'¹⁴⁹

The new crossing

The bridge across the Murray served Euston and Robinvale well for decades and became the vital link between two towns and States. John Katis crossed the bridge regularly in his earlier life as a truck driver:

'I drove trucks to Melbourne and Adelaide and places like that. I remember going over the bridge and another semi-trailer coming the other way and we used to break a mirror or two - that was 40 years ago. Since then it has deteriorated, because the RTA now have made it into a one-lane bridge and I just came over the bridge now and I can tell you it's damn rough, it's bloody rough. The traffic has just grown and grown, and of course with the B-Doubles and the weight that goes on now - the tar off the top of the top of bridge is gone, the surface, it has exposed the wooden railings underneath and it gets very slippery when there's a big frost. It's going to get very dangerous – somebody will go over the side easy.'¹⁵⁰

Len Arnott points out:

'When we were younger it was always looked upon as being a good solid place, but after a while when the heavy trucks went across it and particularly if you were rabbit shooting there, you realized just how much vibration and movement there was in the bridge, and we're talking now many, many years ago. Since then of course the rails along the side have got weaker and weaker. For probably 20 years, the town's been very conscious that something had to be done.'¹⁵¹

The traffic lights installed on either side of the bridge have also been a bone of contention. Ann Gill's experiences are typical:

'Just recently, the Sunday before last I think it was, we were going over to Church and somebody kept coming at us, lights or no lights and quite fast too. I said, 'We'd better get off', it was a ute, and Tim said, 'No he can get off, he's the one that's not supposed to be here', but I was having a fit. One other day recently I went over and the bridge was held up for 20 minutes and I thought, what's going on - they must be doing something there, but it wasn't – it was a man in a caravan who had gone against the lights and they had to get him to back.'¹⁵²

Engineer Brian Hanson of the RTA's Wagga Wagga Office is Project Manager for the construction of the new crossing. We interviewed him first in 2004:

'The bridge is not adequate now to cater for the current loadings, both in traffic volume and axle loadings that we have on the road today. We look at about 3,000 vehicles a day going over this crossing. About probably 18% of that are heavy vehicles – large trucks, so it was a significant traffic volume on the bridge, and the other problem we had with it is a width restriction, particularly on the main bridge, which has plate girders above the deck, supporting the deck. That causes delays and it affects the efficiency of the road system.'¹⁵³

Brian Hanson gives an account of early attempts to improve the crossing:

'We had a plan in 1997/8 to widen the main bridge over the river to allow it to take two lanes of traffic. The only problem with that is the river spans, which are supported on steel plate girders - it wasn't possible to widen those, so we would still have single lane operation over part of the bridge that we would open up a bit more. We drove 'H' section steel piles at each pier on the approach spans of the main

bridge in readiness for constructing new steel trestle piers and a new stronger, widened deck on top, and that work was in progress. We spent some considerable amount of money driving those piles to do that work.’¹⁵⁴

John Katis recalls:

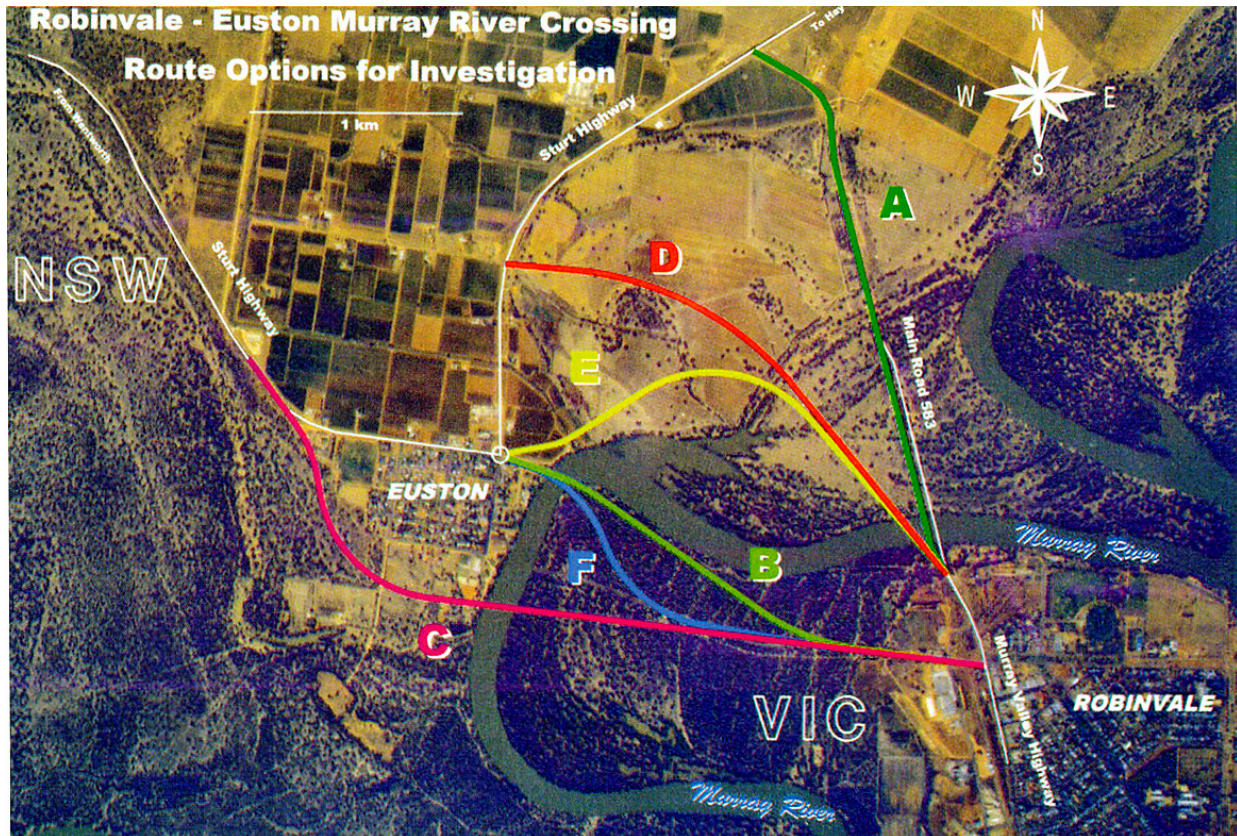
‘We saw this huge amount of steel being brought and laid down beside this old bridge out here and we said, ‘What the hell is going on?’ and they said, ‘Oh, we’re going to shore up the old bridge, put trestles underneath to hold it up with this big H-iron’ and they started belting this H-iron into the ground, 60 or 70 feet. They were going to use them as footings and then they were going to weld them up and put cross trestles on them. I said, ‘Just a bloody minute, you can’t do that, the bridge is falling down; you’re going to waste all this money.’ They were talking about something around five million dollars, but that would have done absolutely nothing because you would always have the ongoing maintenance. So we called a couple of meetings and the community worked in together for a bridge. The Centenary of Federation came at the point when we were looking for a new bridge and we started lobbying for a new bridge and the Federal Government came with seventeen million dollars of Federation funds, which brought the two States to attention.’¹⁵⁵

Brian Hanson commenced work on the project early in 1999:

‘My brief was to manage the project to arrange replacement – or upgrading of that crossing. I wasn’t given any real boundaries, just to say, we need to upgrade the crossing, so that basically, was my brief. When I started the project there had been no work done on the location for a new crossing - we were right at the very start of the project, so we had to go through all that planning work to work out what we would do to upgrade the new crossing and where, in fact, we would build the new crossing.’¹⁵⁶

In order to determine what sort of crossing the community and local government agencies wanted, it was decided to set up a Value Management Study. Brian Hanson was involved:

‘We thought the best way to start this is to have a community study. We call them Value Management Studies, and that involves members of the community and government agency representatives. We come together in a workshop to look at all the options and try to start something off that’s suitable to the community and to the various government agencies and local councils, and that’s where we started it off, actually, early in March 1999. We set up a Value Management Study Workshop over two days and we engaged a professional facilitator to run that for us and we invited a number of members of the community, as well as representatives from various government agencies and local councils, and also the RTA and VicRoads. I also presented three potential alignment options - what we called Options A, B & C at the workshop. During the workshop we worked through those options and we then added another three options during the workshop, Options D, E & F and at the finish of the workshop we came out with an action plan to advance the project, and that was to assess these six options, and also to start a more detailed community consultation process to involve the community in the further development of the project. The community also had an influence on some of the decisions we made. For example, the community influenced the location of the footway – there’s a footway on the bridge. We changed it from one side of the bridge to the other, as a result of input.’¹⁵⁷



Brian Hanson offers further clarification of the various options:

‘Option ‘A’ basically follows the existing alignment. It has a new main bridge immediately downstream from the existing bridge and a new Approach Bridge Number One immediately downstream from the existing bridge and then it connects into existing Approach Bridge Number Two, so basically it follows the existing corridor. Option ‘B’ provided a direct link between Robinvale and Euston through the bushland area just west of Robinvale and it connected into the new roundabout constructed in Euston. It was a very direct route, but it did go through fairly heavily timbered country in the flood plain. Option ‘C’ was similar to Option ‘B’ but it did not go direct to Euston, it skirted around the south side of Euston and connected to the Sturt Highway, just west of Euston. That were the three options that we presented to the Value Management Study. During the study three other options were identified. Option ‘D’ provided a link between Euston and the Sturt Highway, about a kilometre north of Euston, connected to the Sturt Highway. It went through flood plains in NSW. Option ‘E’ connected through the flood plain in NSW directly into the roundabout at Euston, and Option ‘F’ was similar to option ‘D’ in that it went through the bushland just west of Robinvale, directly to the roundabout, but kept away from the river for environmental reasons.¹⁵⁸

John Katis adds:

‘There were two other good options that we looked at that could be easily built, but you would have to come through a lot of the forest, and for the life of me, I, for one could not see the forest being destroyed, because to build a bridge that’s going to be 30 metres wide, you would have to destroy a hell of a lot of forest and I think it would be a disaster, it would be a crime to do that. At the end of the day, we all put our heads together and I think commonsense prevailed and everybody agreed to put

it beside the other one - as I understand it, probably about 10 metres downstream from the present bridge. The reason, I understand was that no bridge is built below another bridge. You always build a bridge on the upstream of the other bridge. It will be very high compared to the other one, probably about 20 to 16 metres higher. The river is classified as the Queen's Highway, so at high river any vehicle must have access under the bridge.'¹⁵⁹

The RTA and VicRoads had formed a Community Consultative Committee to involve the local community in the process. Brian Hanson recalls:

'The Community Consultative Committee expressed a preference that we have a high-level bridge without an opening span, rather than a normal level bridge with an opening span for river traffic. We discussed that to some length at our meetings to make sure that that's what the community wanted, because there are some disadvantages in a high-level bridge. There's the aesthetics of having a bridge that goes up much higher. There's also noise impacts of having the bridge higher, but the community was quite adamant that they didn't want a bridge that would cause any delays through the need to open a span for river traffic and the decision was made, as a result of that to provide a high-level bridge that doesn't need to have an opening span.'¹⁶⁰

After the Committee had expressed its preference for the type of bridge and its location, there were environmental, indigenous and heritage issues to consider. Brian Hanson continues:

'Once we selected the preferred option – Option 'A', we then carried out a detailed environmental assessment, which is what we call a Review of Environmental Factors, or an REF. This assessment looked at environmental considerations, such as flora, fauna, impact on the river, water quality, climate, soils, trees and so on. We also looked at the economic considerations and we needed to do that to justify the project. After we examined all these we looked at ways in which we could mitigate the effect on the environment.'¹⁶¹

John Katis attended every meeting of the Committee:

'We were asked all sorts of questions that would be relevant to the building of the crossing. They asked us about Aboriginal heritage sites, what sorts of animals, insects or things that we know are harboured in the forest, how high the water would come, the flows, what sorts of trees grow around here, the bird life – every question. We went through everything humanly possible – we were there to help as much as we could. Of course, there were experts coming in those fields and we would help them, so all that kind of history was asked of us. It was on our shoulders that we asked to have our Aboriginal people get involved in it, which was a great idea, and we made recommendations to the RTA to employ Aboriginal people, because I think it would bring our communities together, plus I think it would help those people to be involved in the building of the bridge during the construction.'¹⁶²

Darcy Pettit was one of the representatives for the indigenous population:

'Option 'A' was the only option anywhere to go, because the connection up to Option 'A' is where the spiritual side comes in again. The damage was already done 30 or 40 years before I was born. For us to allow any other option would destroy even more of that sacred land that we hold very, very sacred and very precious. So Option 'A', as far as the Aboriginal people were concerned was the only option that will stand up, There's midden sites, there's burial grounds that been destroyed, and through working with Brian (Hanson) we've worked around that. It will take a sliding

effect over pylons and these extra long spans will go over the top of the midden grounds, but actually no pylons will go into the midden ground itself.¹⁶³

We asked Darcy if the indigenous population was happy with Option 'A':

'I would say yes, on the whole. Personally I'm very happy with Option 'A', which is alongside the existing bridge on the downstream side, coming from Victoria. It would be a magnificent sight for the bridge to be coming from Robinvale straight to Euston, but the damage that they would do in such an adventure would destroy so much of our history and it's down to whatever is along the rivers at this stage.'¹⁶⁴

The new crossing is an initiative of the RTA with involvement by VicRoads. Brian Hanson explains:

VicRoads and the RTA are joint proponents for the construction of this crossing – we basically share the crossing because it is a border bridge. By agreement with VicRoads, the RTA is project-managing the project. VicRoads are involved all the way through the process, through meetings. We ensure that VicRoads agree with what we're doing at each phase, we make sure that all their requirements are satisfied, we involve them in the work, but it is the RTA that's running the project and project-managing it.'¹⁶⁵

The fifty million dollar project actually involves the construction of three major bridges, as Brian Hanson points out:

'There's the main bridge over the Murray River and part of the flood plain and there are two approach bridges: Approach Bridge Number One and Approach Bridge Number Two. Approach Bridge One is about 156 metres long and Approach Bridge Two is about 180 metres long. The main bridge over the river and flood plain is 671 metres long. With the main bridge, part of that is built out of incrementally launched box girders, and part of it is out of pre-cast, pre-stressed Super-T girders. There are 15 piers on the main bridge and two abutments. The overall width of the main bridge is 12.6 metres. That includes a walkway and two traffic lanes, 3.5 metres wide. The Super-T sections are about 33 metres long on the main bridge. On Approach Bridge Number One we have five Super-T spans, each 31 metres long. We have four piers to support that, plus two abutments at each end. On Approach Bridge Number Two we have six Super-T girder spans supported on five piers and two abutments. The overall width of Approach Bridges One and Two is 10.2 metres.'¹⁶⁶

'The walkway we're designing has two metres clear width. That will provide enough room for cyclists to use it, based on the expected fairly low volumes of cyclists and pedestrians. We will allow cyclists to use that.'¹⁶⁷

'The bridge is more complex than most of our normal country bridges are, mainly because of it needing to be high over the river to provide the navigational clearances. Once you go high, you then need to have longer spans, otherwise you have a bridge that looks like a bridge on stilts. So to get the balance between the span length and the height of the bridge it was necessary to go to long spans, and that changed the style of the bridge from being one where we build it out of pre-cast, pre-stressed units to being an incrementally launched box section, which is what has been adopted here for the main spans over the river. That is much more complex than the normal pre-cast units, which are lifted into place by cranes on top of the piers. The main spans over the river from the Robinvale abutment across the river and down toward the flood plain are all very large box sections that are incrementally launched from the Victorian side of the river. The box sections are actually cast on the bank of the

river and then jacked out and more are cast on and jacked out, so it's a progressive way of building the bridge on the bank and jacking it out on to the constructed piers in the river.'¹⁶⁸

'The piers for most of the crossing are anchored on driven reinforced concrete piles that are driven down to a substantial depth to achieve the required capacity. The only exception is the two piers in the river and the two piers on the bank of the river, which are to be constructed out of 1.5 metre diameter steel tubes, which are driven down quite deep, to a depth to obtain the capacity they need, and then the soil on the top section is excavated and replaced with reinforced concrete. There are three of these piles in each pier.'¹⁶⁹

John Katis adds:

'The way it is going to be constructed is going to be terrific, so I've been told. All contaminants, whether they be water or anything on the bridge will be collected to a basin on each side of the bridge and taken away from there, so it will not affect the environment in any way whatsoever. All the heritage sites or midden sites, or any Aboriginal sites of historical significance that are there while we're constructing the bridge will be protected by cement barriers, so a truck can't drive over it or anything like that, and then those barriers will be lifted once the construction is finished. Even what we call the snags, the rotten trees in the river – if they have to be removed they will be replaced on the same spot, so nothing will be disturbed. Then we're going to have a bike path on the bridge and a pedestrian path on it. They'll have a buffer zone, so none of the traffic can run over, say, a cyclist or anything like that, and when they come into the NSW side, we will go under the bridge and we'll have to have a walking path to use – for tourists that walk from Robinvale, they can come to Euston and enjoy that beautiful scenic walk through the forest in NSW – it's going to be fantastic.'¹⁷⁰

Brian Hanson explains the tendering process for contractors to build the new crossing:

'With this project being quite large and being Design and Construct, we felt that it was necessary to shortlist the tenderers to price the work. That's simply because tenderers incur a very significant cost in preparing tenders, and if we have five or ten tenders coming in, it's an enormous cost for the construction contractors to prepare. So we prepared a document, which basically set out what we needed in the project and we invited all the major companies who were pre-qualified to the appropriate level to submit an expression of interest in being registered for the project. From that we received nine very, very detailed submissions. These submissions were assessed by myself and quite a few other people in the RTA and even outside the RTA. We then compared all the submissions and from that we selected three major companies to be invited to tender. We then prepared detailed documentation of our requirements in this Design and Construct contract, and we asked those three companies to submit proposals and pricing for the work, which they did. We then went through a very detailed tender assessment process to compare those three submissions and ultimately we selected Baulderstone-Hornibrook to do the work for us.'¹⁷¹

There are some formidable challenges to be faced during construction, as Brian Hanson forecasts:

'We do expect the incrementally launched sections of the main bridge to be quite challenging in the size of the work and the accuracy required and the quality control necessary to build that. We also think that the construction of the foundations in the

river involving the 1.5 metre diameter steel tubes will be quite challenging work because they're so large and they need to be driven so deep out in the water. Finally, the demolition of the existing crossing - to do that in a careful manner that doesn't damage the river and remove the crossing completely will require some careful control work as well.'¹⁷²

The dismantling of the old bridge is also an environmental issue, as John Katis informs:

'The steel part has been preserved by lead-based paints, which is very detrimental to the contamination of the river, so they've got to come down. All the wooden approaches, if they are contaminated by pesticides that were used – like DDT, are going to be wrapped up in plastic and buried, like asbestos is. If they're not contaminated the wood will be, I would say, part of the decision of the contractor - he can do as he wishes. I know my Council has asked if they can take some of the timber for the Pioneer Settlement in Swan Hill. We have a wharf down there for paddleboats, so it could be used. People buy the wood because it is very good wood. We'll take the lift span down and place it off the railway line on the Victorian side, because we have some items there and we have a railway precinct, as an historical site. We have a turning table and a water tank and a couple of other items, the old railway station in Robinvale in the old days, and we're going to erect it back there, the lift span, as an historical monument to the railways and to the old bridge. We will put up a huge historical board to show the building of the bridge – even the Aboriginal history before that, to the present day, and that's a condition that the RTA and VicRoads have put to the builders of the bridge, that this will happen.'¹⁷³

John Katis ponders the prospects for the local communities in having the new crossing:

'Where this bridge is situated it will change the whole lifestyle of this country and of Swan Hill. You'll have a huge tourism industry coming up this way – even the reports that were given to us say that the users of the bridge and the road will go up by 5% to 10%, so it will be a corridor from here along to what we call the Murray Valley Highway, from here to Echuca and places like that. It will follow from Bendigo, so they'll come through here because being a very wealthy viticulture, horticulture industry with almonds, all varieties of fruit stone, it will be fantastic and you're going to find a lot of tourism will come up this way. (The bridge) is going to be a huge talking point – it's going to be higher than Mildura, a huge arc and it's going to be one of the longest ones because of the width of the flood plain, and we're going to do all the small bridges from there to the Sturt Highway – there's three there – so they'll be reconstructed and widened and you've got to have a state-of-the-art intersection onto the Sturt Highway. It's going to be easier and quicker for us to access Mildura services – Robinvale and Euston use Mildura a lot to go and see a doctor or a hospital, or to buy goods that we don't have here. So that's going to open up and we use the bridge for our trucking – all of our produce goes up north, the rest goes south to Melbourne, but most of it goes to NSW, Sydney, Brisbane and those places. We have a lot of dry country in southern NSW that the bridge will service, and we're talking about grains – they all go south to ports in Melbourne. The bridge will have a huge impact on the economy of not only Victoria, but NSW too.'¹⁷⁴

Constructing the bridges

In late 2004 building materials began arriving at the site and the hopes of the citizens of Robinvale and Euston were about to be realised. Work started on the foundations for the piers as Brian Hanson recalls:

‘Probably the most uncertain part of any bridge construction is the foundations. We do an enormous amount of investigations before we start the work to work out the geotechnical conditions we have and from that we design our foundations, and that is what happened here, but there is always uncertainty and it is not until you actually start constructing the foundations do you really realise what is going to happen. They did have difficulties, mainly in achieving the design capacities of the piles and in particular the large piles that we used in and adjacent to the river, they were one point five metre diameter steel tubes, driven down to a substantial depth and partially filled with concrete. The testing of those after they drove them in indicated inadequate capacity and they had to do a lot of investigative work to work out why and change things to improve the capacity so it did meet the design loadings.’¹⁷⁵



Pile driving, 2005

‘Initially the first ones they put in they actually drove to a much greater depth. I think our design depth was around twenty metres and they drove some down to forty metres, which is a very substantial depth to drive those steel casings. Subsequent to that the further ones they did - they actually constructed what we call a cruciform in the bottom of the pile, which is very large steel plates welded in the bottom of the

pile, vertical plates, which increases the surface area at the toe of the pile and increases the resistance. In doing that, that had a remarkable improvement in the loading capacity of the pile and that is how they increased the capacity for the subsequent piles. So eventually the problem was solved but it did take a lot of investigation and some delays to come to the correct solution at the end. The pile caps were down in the water so we had to have permanent formwork there that was sealed up to keep the water out which went down below the water level, that caused some challenges.’¹⁷⁶

The local community was very much intrigued by the activity on site:

‘We had a lot of interest from the local community, in fact we had so much interest that we constructed a viewing platform right near the casting yard and we used to have a lot of people coming in having a look during the day at the work going on in the casting yard. The existing bridge was adjacent to the new bridge, so as people drove over the old crossing they could observe what was going on. So there was a lot of interest and we were under scrutiny all the time from the local community.’¹⁷⁷

What were the innovations or ‘firsts’ in construction techniques to build the new bridges?

‘There are probably no firsts. Innovative things done - I think the box girder is not common, this jacking out a box girder is not used very often, only in special circumstances, it is fairly complicated and challenging and that was fairly innovative. There was use of external stressing inside the box girder. As each of the segments were constructed and joined together they were pre-stressed by cables in them up to a certain strength but after the launching of the whole box girder right across there was additional pre-stressing put inside the box girder and stressed up to carry the live loads and that is a little bit unusual, they normally stress it all up as they build it rather than doing it later, so that was a little bit different and it seems to have worked well.’¹⁷⁸



Box girder launched over pier

The materials used for the construction had to be of premium quality to satisfy design requirements:

‘There are basically two materials used in the bridges and that is concrete and steel. Both those materials are vital to the successful working of the bridge. Concrete has to be of a very high quality for durability reasons, the bridges are designed to last a hundred years, the concrete has got to at least last that time, so there is very high demands on getting a very good concrete mix. Now this involves strict requirements for the materials used in the concrete, the aggregate and the cement - in fact, to get suitable aggregate the closest quarry was at Lake Boga, which was about a hundred and forty kilometres haul and that was to get material of suitable quality. We also had to make sure that the cement and aggregate were mixed in the right proportions and mixed properly and there is a lot of work in designing the actual mix to get the right proportions. Once you’ve got the wet concrete on site the next challenge is to place it properly, compact it properly so it is fully compacted and you don’t have voids in it where air or water can get into the steel. So the concrete is a challenging and important part of the project and it was handled well on this job by careful attention to detail.’¹⁷⁹

Climatic conditions demanded that the concrete be mixed at all hours of the day:

‘The contractor found that the temperatures during the day in summer rose up into the high thirties and that became too hot to place the concrete, it would cure too quick before they could get the correct compaction and shape, so what they did then to get around that was to start in the very early hours of the morning. Some of the pours on the box girder segments started around 2:00 a.m. in the morning and were completed before lunchtime, before the temperatures got too high. So that is how they got around the high temperatures.’¹⁸⁰

The process of building the three bridges, connected to each other was very intricate:

‘The box girder segments were progressively made in the casting yard - after you make a unit you have to jack that unit forward to get it out of the way so you can build the next unit and so on. This continued on until the complete box girder was built, which is about three hundred and eighty metres long. After they finished constructing a section it was necessary to jack it forward and they used a system on this job of a combination of a jack and a pushing ram and that was assembled right at Abutment ‘A’, at the southern abutment. Once they moved the girder forward over the full length of the ram the jack then lowered the box down onto the abutment and the ram retracted and pulled back and the process repeated by jacking up again, pushing forward. This process went on for however many times it was needed to move the box girder forward over the length of the full segment that had been constructed. At the time the jacking was happening, as the box girder was passing over piers there were workmen there inserting Teflon-coated plates to reduce the friction as it slid over the piers and that was all controlled back to one control location back at the box girder to make sure that if anything happened at any piers the whole process could stop immediately.’¹⁸¹



Box girder launched to Pier 4



Girder installed to Pier 8

However, as with any large construction job things did not always proceed as planned:

‘We had problems with cover on the steel of pre-cast parapet units. These units effectively form the kerbs on either side of the bridge and they were cast at a casting yard in Ballarat, Victoria and for some reason we discovered when the units arrived on site that some of them didn’t have the required cover of concrete over the steel. Some were bad enough that they had to be replaced completely with new units and some were not so bad and we were able to treat the units with a special silane treatment and decorative painting on top to protect the steel. The problem here is that insufficient cover on the steel can cause problems in the future with corrosion of the steel and spalling of the concrete, so it was important that we made sure that we didn’t have a compromised product and it has been fully rectified now. But that was a costly problem and it just shows you that things can go wrong, but they can be fixed too.’¹⁸²



The view south

The safety record on this construction job was exemplary:

‘We were very fortunate on this job that we had no significant accidents, we had a couple of small first-aid treatment type injuries. We had no lost-time injuries and what I mean by lost-time injury is an injury which involves someone being off the site for more than two days, that did not occur at all, which I think is quite an achievement.’¹⁸³

Working in the river, pollution of the environment was always a possibility:

‘There was never any significant pollution. At one particular instance there was a breakage of a hydraulic hose which discharged a small amount oil into the river - the contractor had an oil spill kit ready and available on site if that happened. The oil spill was treated straight away and was cleaned up without any damage to the environment. There was no noticeable pollution at all during the work.’¹⁸⁴

Brian Hanson details the final configuration of the bridges:

‘On the three bridges there are two traffic lanes for both directions, one southbound, one northbound - it caters for about three thousand vehicles a day, so that is quite adequate. On the main bridge we have also installed a two-metre wide footway which takes people from Robinvale across the Murray River through the floodplain into the New South Wales floodplain - that will connect up to a picnic area over on the New South Wales side. There is also a proposal that a pathway be connected through to Euston as well, so that will provide the cycle/walkway from Euston to Robinvale.’¹⁸⁵

The old bridge was progressively dismantled:

‘The second approach bridge was dismantled during the course of the work because the new bridge was on the same location as the old bridge, so that one went very early in the piece. Approach Bridge No.1 has been completely dismantled now and the main bridge over the Murray River is almost completely dismantled, there are still some remnants of the piers in the river which will be removed over the next few weeks, so that work is virtually complete.’¹⁸⁶



Partly dismantled old bridge in background

On the seventh of October 2006 the bridge was officially opened:

‘The bridge didn’t actually open that day but we had the ceremony, and that was attended by what some people conservatively estimate at two thousand people - there was an enormous crowd that came along to the opening. We had official speeches in McGinty Park, just down from the southern approach to the bridge, and after that was completed we moved up onto the bridge and we had the cutting of the ribbon and unveiling of the plaque on the bridge. After that everyone walked over the bridge and enjoyed their time on the bridge, there were also festivities back in the park all that afternoon as well as a parade of vintage machinery and vintage vehicles. So it was a very big, very successful day enjoyed by many, many local people.’¹⁸⁷



Crowd at opening, October 2006

How has the new bridge been received by the community?:

'The response from the community, without exception has been very positive, very excited, very appreciative of the new bridge. They had been putting up with an old crossing which was a single lane, very rough surface for many, many years and to have a new bridge which had no delays, had a smooth surface and didn't have an opening or lifting opening span in it was an enormous benefit to the community and everyone recognised that. We are still receiving positive comments how good it is.'¹⁸⁸

The cost of the project came in on budget:

'The final cost will be just over fifty million for the whole project, that includes all the development work as well as the design and construction and finalisation. Our estimate was just over fifty million so we should come in just under the estimate, which is fortunate.'¹⁸⁹

Brian Hanson explains how the new bridges integrate with the landscape:

'They fit in well. Baulderstone-Hornibrook was very careful during the construction to not remove any more trees than what it had to and the balance of trees and the new bridge looks good, even now. We will be planting a lot more trees over the coming months once the cooler weather comes but we have been lucky that we have been able to save a lot of trees there so it doesn't look like a very disturbed landscape and those trees balance well with the bridge, they camouflage the bridge

and it looks good. We are also very pleased with the aesthetics of the new bridges. Our concept design, which was given to the tenderers was of a lower standard than what has been provided. Boulderstone-Hornibrook offered us a better design and this provided longer span length over the Murray River and floodplain, which makes the bridge look more balanced and it also impacts less in the river by only having two piers in the river, so that is a plus. Also the section of the main bridge superstructure and the other two bridges were built with long spans as well, using Super-T girders. So we are pleased with the outcome, we think aesthetically it is a very pleasing crossing.’¹⁹⁰

What has been the indigenous community reaction to the new crossing?:

‘Right from the inception of this project when we started looking at options we involved the indigenous community. I had many meetings with various groups in the indigenous community and I was fortunate to get very much co-operation from these various people and they had input into what they thought should and shouldn’t be done. This is the first project I’ve been on where I have been associated with the indigenous community and it has been a bit of an eye-opener for me and perhaps a learning process, but I think I have learnt a lot more about the indigenous community and I’ve got a lot more respect now for their issues and concerns. I have many friends in the indigenous community now and I know from talking to them that they are very pleased with the final result.’¹⁹¹

In summing up, Brian Hanson had this to say:

‘I always feel relieved at the end. I think we have achieved a very good project, I think we have got an asset in the community over there that will last for hopefully at least a hundred years, which is the design life, so I am pleased that we have achieved that without any significant accidents and we’ve achieved that without any significant community concerns or issues, we have got everyone on side, so I think it is a good outcome.’¹⁹²



The future

What is the future of Robinvale and Euston likely to be? Len Arnott offers this scenario:

'The town's going to go ahead. It's changed so dramatically. The town was an Anglo-Saxon, soldier settlers, white Australian town where there was a huge amount of cooperation. Everyone hopped in, helped each other – if you were ill, the town would come and help you prune your block, or whatever it was. Today that attitude has gone, it's become multi-cultural. Instead of having 278 dried fruit growers, you've now got the properties coordinated into larger properties and in the future I think the land will develop into bigger and bigger holdings of conglomerates, rather than small individual people.'¹⁹³

Beryl Arnott adds this qualification:

'It will always be here, it will probably grow a bit. I think that the whole future of the entire Murray Valley is under question because there's just not enough water. All the water that we get is already allocated – there's no room for expansion. The only way you'd be able to expand irrigation industries is by more conservative use of the water, and they have done that to a great extent. This little drip feeding of plants, rather than huge overhead sprays spraying water everywhere, this pipe drip-feeding of plants means they can spread the water out, I think someone said, about ten times further than they used to be able to. So it will still be here, it'll probably go ahead, but it will depend on the water, how far it goes ahead, like all the Murray valley.'¹⁹⁴

John Katis thinks:

'Population growth is coming to Robinvale, whether we like it or not. Not because of the bridge – there's some people from the Horn of Africa that are refugees and both the NSW and Victorian Government will push some of those people and other refugees toward regional areas, so we're expecting to have some influx of refugees from Sudan, Ethiopia and those places. Just in the last five years our horticulture and viticulture industries have been growing all the time, it's taken off. It's no good just using words, the action is out there, you see a great big crop has now opened up, a huge amount of money has been invested here, superannuation money and all that sort of thing and no government would give you money to build a bridge unless they were going to get something back. Again, the studies show that an infrastructure like this would have a life span of 100 years and it has shown that this bridge in monetary terms will be paid off in 30 years, so at the end of the day, the government is going to sit back and enjoy 60 years without spending a penny – it's fantastic.'¹⁹⁵

List of Interviewees

<i>Name</i>	<i>Tape No.</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Duration</i>
Bill & Val McGinty	RTA-MRC:FH1-2	15/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	89 mins
Kaye Grose	RTA-MRC:FH3-4	16/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	107 mins
Len & Beryl Arnott	RTA-MRC:FH5-6	16/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	79 mins
Valerie & Jack Forbes	RTA-MRC:FH7	16/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	45 mins
Jean Wilson	RTA-MRC:FH8	16/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	33 mins
Darcy Pettit	RTA-MRC:FH9-10	17/06/2004	Euston NSW	72 mins
Jenny Black	RTA-MRC:FH11-12	17/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	69 mins
Trevor Wilde	RTA-MRC:FH13	17/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	40 mins
John Katis	RTA-MRC:FH14	17/06/2004	Euston NSW	52 mins
Ann Gill	RTA-MRC:FH15	18/06/2004	Euston NSW	41 mins
Bill Peart	RTA-MRC:FH16-17	18/06/2004	Robinvale, Vic	74 mins
Stan Parke	RTA-MRC:FH18	18/06/2004	Tol Tol, Vic	38 mins
Brian Hanson	RTA-MRC:FH19-20	14/10/2004	Cremorne NSW	79 mins
Brian Hanson	RTA-MRC:FH21	07/03/2007	Cremorne NSW	55 mins

Bill McGinty



Born in 1928 at Euston, Bill McGinty is one of Robinvale's outstanding citizens. Trained as a motor mechanic, Bill developed an interest in radio servicing and the movies when Nulty's came to screen films at Robinvale. He spent 30 years servicing radios and as a projectionist. Bill was a councillor for 21 years, Chairman of the local Water Board and is a former Shire President. He was the driving force in getting the Hostel for the Aged built in Robinvale.

Val McGinty



Born in Swan Hill in 1927, Val McGinty has been a Robinvale resident since 1936. The daughter of a dairy family, she attended Robinvale school, saw steamers ply their trade on the Murray, lived through the Great Depression with kerosene lamps and candles, worked as a telephonist in the PMG's Department and later as a bookkeeper for Herbert Cuttle for many years. Val has had more than 50 years of happy life with her husband Bill.

Kaye Grose



Kaye Grose arrived in Robinvale in the middle of a drought in 1943 to teach the 45 students from preps to year eight at Robinvale school. She soon became Chairman of the School Committee. Kaye saw the last train cross over the bridge in 1943 and taught at the school until her retirement in 1981. Kaye is President of the Euston/Robinvale Historical Society. She was instrumental in organising Robinvale's fiftieth and eightieth anniversary celebrations.

Len and Beryl Arnott



Len Arnott's mother came to Robinvale on the day of the first Land Auction in 1924 and his family are among the original pioneers. Len's father established a thriving country departmental store that sold manchester, footwear and drapery. Beryl arrived in Robinvale from Melbourne in 1952 as a young teacher straight out of Teachers College and taught at the school for years. Beryl and Len have both made significant contributions to the welfare of the citizens of Robinvale.

Valerie and Jack Forbes



After training for the war as an air gunner, Jack Forbes came to Robinvale in 1954 as a soldier settler and started growing varieties of dried table grapes and fruits. Valerie joined him and together, they give lucid accounts of life on the Soldier Settlement blocks in the 1950s. Jack is President of the RSL and Hospital Auxiliary, Secretary of the Masonic Lodge and is involved with the Robinvale Secondary College Band. Jack was also President of the Table Grape Association for many years. The Forbes' have four children and ten grandchildren.



Jean Wilson



Born in Mildura in 1918, Jean Wilson met her husband Geoff, a pharmacist at Phillip Island in 1942 while helping to supply food for men fighting a bushfire. Jean and her husband opened Robinvale's first pharmacy in 1946 at the commencement of the Soldier Settlement block allocations. Her husband, as well as being a pharmacist was in great demand as a vet and treated patients as well as animals. Jean has contributed countless hours of voluntary work as a nurse and in helping Robinvale to gain a Baby Health Centre, hospital, swimming pool and other necessities of life.

Darcy Pettit



One of seven children, Darcy Pettit grew up on the Murray River. He attended school at Tocumwal, but from the age of nine, lived on Greendale Station with his blind uncle and his stepfather who became his spiritual teachers. In the interview, Darcy talks about the spiritual significance of the river and gives us a brief history of the tribes that inhabited the area. Darcy is an adviser on the Community Consultative Committee formed by the RTA and VicRoads on the heritage and environmental issues involved in locating the new crossing.

Jenny Black



Born Jeannette Cuttle in 1920, Jenny Black grew up in Ultima where her grandparents had set up a small store in 1901. The Cuttles prospered and provided funds to build the Anglican Church in Ultima as a memorial to their son George Robin Cuttle who gave his name to Robinvale. Jenny trained as a nurse and married George Black, a returned soldier. Jenny gives a captivating account of her life as a Soldier Settler wife from the 1950s.

Trevor Wilde



In 1936, Trevor Wilde and his sister Val McGinty came to live in Robinvale when it was just one main street. He recalls living at the Lock when it was still under construction and supplying the workers with milk from their dairy farm. In 1937-1938 Trevor moved to Euston and supplied Robinvale with its milk. He recalls the flood of 1956 when he moved all of his dairy cattle across the bridge to Victoria and brought them back again afterwards. Trevor is a keen train fan and rode on the train to Korakee every Sunday afternoon, making friends with the drivers. He was on the last train to cross over the bridge in 1943. Trevor faithfully delivered milk to the citizens of Euston and Robinvale for over 50 years.

John Katis



Born into a horticultural family in Greece, John Katis arrived in Robinvale in 1956 in time to see the great flood. During his 48 years at Robinvale he has lived through all of the major events of the town and takes part in shaping its future as a Councillor on Swan Hill Shire Council. John has been involved in every meeting of the Community Consultative Committee for the new crossing. He foresees a bright future for the area now that the new crossing has been completed.

Ann Gill



Ann Gill was a small child during the Depression at Mt Gambier, S.A. She trained as a nurse and worked at Casterton Hospital for nineteen years before coming to Robinvale in 1985 to work at the hospital. She loves living at Robinvale which she describes as a friendly, successful community. Ann is a member of the Community Consultative Committee that advised the road authorities on the location, environmental and heritage issues concerning the new crossing.

Bill Peart



Born in 1913, Bill Peart was one of a family of twelve children who arrived at Robinvale in 1925. His father worked on the construction of the first crossing and Bill has vivid memories of its progress. Bill also worked on the construction of the Lock as a labourer and helped to build the cofferdams. Bill was present at the opening of the bridge and rode on the first train across. In 1940, Bill enlisted and took part in the war effort in Palestine and the Western Desert, North Africa as one of the 'Rats' of Tobruk. Bill provides valuable accounts of life during the Great Depression and the War and has lived through all of the major events that have shaped the history of Euston and Robinvale.

Stan Parke



Born in 1920, Stan Parke arrived in Robinvale by Cobb & Co coach in 1923 when Robinvale was still called Bumbang and consisted of a homestead, wine shanty and blacksmith's shop. His father was a Soldier Settler from the First World War who grew wheat and ran sheep. Stan and his brother took over their parents' farm after the Second World War and grew vegetables, maize, fruit and cotton. He remembers steamers on the river and was a passenger on the first train that ran across the bridge on opening day in 1928.

Brian Hanson



After completing a Civil Engineering course in 1971, Brian Hanson commenced his career with the NSW Department of Main Roads as Assistant Works Engineer at the Finley Works Office. He gained valuable experience in setting out roads, worked on the Cobb Highway and became involved in bridge maintenance. He spent seven years in the New England area as Works Engineer at Armidale and Area Engineer at Glen Innes. Following that, he project managed the Gobba Deviation at Wagga Wagga and a new dual carriageway for the reconstruction of the Hume Highway. As RTA Project Manager he oversaw construction of the new crossing over the Murray River that links Robinvale in Victoria with Euston and the Sturt Highway in New South Wales.

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- ¹³⁹ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 06:45
- ¹⁴⁰ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 41:46
- ¹⁴¹ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 40:31
- ¹⁴² Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 37:27
- ¹⁴³ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 25:13
- ¹⁴⁴ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 25:40
- ¹⁴⁵ Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 48:11
- ¹⁴⁶ Interview with Len Arnott, 16/6/04, Tape RTA-MRC:FH5, 32:43
- ¹⁴⁷ Interview with Kay Grose, 16/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH3, 12:49
- ¹⁴⁸ Interview with Kay Grose, 16/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH4, 31:50
- ¹⁴⁹ Interview with Kay Grose, 16/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH4, 27:26
- ¹⁵⁰ Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 32:12
- ¹⁵¹ Interview with Len Arnott, 16/6/04, Tape RTA-MRC:FH6, 01:11
- ¹⁵² Interview with Ann Gill, 18/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH15, 24:48

- 153 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 12:25
- 154 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 13:58
- 155 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 47:43
- 156 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 08:39
- 157 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 10:01
- 158 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 22:07
- 159 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 18:52
- 160 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 30:44
- 161 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 28:43
- 162 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 14:41
- 163 Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 48:52
- 164 Interview with Darcy Pettit, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH9, 53:09 & 54:32
- 165 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 16:22
- 166 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 50:33
- 167 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 53:12
- 168 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 43:50
- 169 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 48:39
- 170 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 43:28
- 171 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH19, 41:58
- 172 Interview with Brian Hanson, 14/10/04 Tape RTA-MRC:FH20, 00:26
- 173 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 40:21
- 174 Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 26:23
- 175 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 10:06
- 176 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 11:16
- 177 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 17:55
- 178 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 18:05
- 179 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 20:11
- 180 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 22:00
- 181 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 24:31
- 182 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 31:40
- 183 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 29:27
- 184 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 30:20
- 185 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 35:03
- 186 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 09:16
- 187 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 43:09
- 188 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 40:09
- 189 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 42:44
- 190 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 44:53
- 191 Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 48:09

¹⁹² Interview with Brian Hanson, 7/3/2007, Tape RTA-MRC:FH21, 53:34

¹⁹³ Interview with Len Arnott, 16/6/04, Tape RTA-MRC:FH6, 19:40

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Beryl Arnott, 16/6/04, Tape RTA-MRC:FH6, 20:59

¹⁹⁵ Interview with John Katis, 17/6/2004, Tape RTA-MRC:FH14, 13:24

Oral History CD Track List

1. Introduction, indigenous history, river trade (5:06)
2. Robin Cuttle, early days in Robinvale, building the first crossing (6:17)
3. Deaths during construction, opening day of the old bridge (3:17)
4. Trains across the bridge, the Great Depression (5:48)
5. The Second World War, Kay Grose's arrival at Robinvale (4:31)
6. The last train, the McGinty's house (3:19)
7. Soldier Settlers, the table grape industry (4:33)
8. Reinventing themselves, dangers on the bridge (5:04)
9. The deteriorating bridge, plans for a new crossing (4:52)
10. The Community Consultative Committee, various options (2:57)
11. The REF, environmental issues, configuration of the new bridge (3:57)
12. Design, landscaping, how the bridge was built (4:03)
13. The opening ceremony, future prospects, conclusion (4:56)

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