



## City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Roger Backway

Interviewee: Roger Backway [RB]

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians [SR]

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### Horrie Peacock – local hero

**RB:** ... The other thing that I'd like to mention, and it's a bit drawn-out, but there was a man in Elwood in Ormond Road called Horrie Peacock and he ran a bike shop. It was only a tiny little shop and he manufactured his own bikes there. He had a blacksmith's forge in the back of the shop and he used to weld up all his bike frames and everything there. I think he sent them away to be painted and then they came back.

He manufactured two models of gents' bikes and two models of ladies' bikes, and he also manufactured a large three-wheeler chain driven bike which were used by little old ladies and disabled people that couldn't ride a regular bike. He was quite famous for those.

His shop was more than a bike shop; if your footy went flat you'd take it to him and he'd pump it up, if your tennis racquet needed restringing he'd do that or get it done, and he sold golf clubs and golf shoes, fishing rods, all the fishing stuff.

**08:14**

One of the joys of going down there in those days, when you had a puncture he'd take out the inner tube and he used to find the hole in the tube and fix it up by a method called vulcanising. A rubber patch was put on and a little cup with some sort of stuff that burst into flame to create heat, and it was put on and it was set with a clamp, and he'd light it up with a match and it made the most wonderful smell that you could ever imagine; it was like firecracker night all over again. You were lucky if you actually got there, you wanted to be there when this was happening as a kid.

Mr Peacock was a bit of a disciplinarian insomuch as kids should be seen over there and not spoken to until asked to speak, and if you were being served and an adult walked in you were pushed off to the side and the adults would be served first. You were told your place. He was an athlete of some skill, he'd won numerous bike races in his day, and he was still servicing some of those riders, there were often people all dressed up in bike gear. Later on in life it wasn't unusual to see Sir Hubert Opperman ride by and stop off to talk with Horrie. I was introduced to Sir Hubert and I ended up going to work for him as an electrician for a number of years.

When the tubes had been vulcanised Mr Peacock would then take the clamp out, he'd put a pump on and pump it up. You'd say to him, "Is it fixed yet, Mr Peacock?" and he'd say, "I don't think so. I've just got to test it." He'd put it behind himself and he'd break wind on it - he seemed to be the only man in the world that could break wind when he wanted to - then he'd bring it around and he'd say, "Smell this, son, do you think it's fixed now?" *[laughs]* He got me *[laughs]* and I saw him get another kid with the same thing. I don't know how many kids he did that to but he did it.

**SR: So he was very strict but he also was a bit of a joker?**

**RB:** It was a bit of a joke. He wanted to put the kids down to where they should be which was the thinking in those days. Kids should be seen and not heard; go outside and play; all this sort of thing.

**11:10**

**SR: It sounds to me like you had a stronger relationship with him than just taking your bike or your tennis racquet or whatever to be fixed. How did that emerge?**

**RB:** I didn't have a bike until later on but I used to go with my friend who had a bike and there always seemed to be needed something to be done. I don't know. It was just a joy to go into the shop because there was so much stuff there. We didn't get out to go shopping in the city or anything like that, and the only toys that we had come into the family were at Christmas time and my birthday which were just about together. So going into that shop was a joy.

Later on Mr Peacock died and the shop was locked up for quite some time, then all of a sudden our neighbour came along and said, "Have you seen the stuff outside the bike shop?" There was all stuff on the footpath. We went down - by this time I'd grown up, I was a big electrician by then. There was a man there carting the stuff out onto the footpath called Mr Long and he was the secretary of the Victorian League of Wheelmen. Mrs Peacock had called him in because Mrs Peacock had been left destitute, she didn't have any money. Although Horrie could build a beautiful bike he didn't have much business sense. And all the money was sitting on the shelves unsold in goods; tennis racquets and stuff that had been there for 30 and 40 years.

So it was decided to open up the shop and put some stuff out at fire price sale and have a garage sale out on the street, which worked. I went down there because I was a fisherman and there was still a lot of fishing stuff in the shop and I offered to buy some. Mr Long was struggling a bit so I offered to give him a hand to help. A couple of days later another guy appeared with a trailer and put it outside the shop and then started putting all the stuff into the trailer. I said, "Where's all that going? We're trying to sell it." He said, "I'm taking it to the tip." A lot of it was junk. There were boxes of golf shoes that had been there for 30 years, they were rubber and they were perishing and all going hard.

And when he had his forge going, which I think was run on coke and charcoal and things like that, it went right through the shop and a lot of the stuff was damaged by the grit that was given off. You'd pick things up and it was all smoky - it deserved to go to the tip. But I decided that I needed some of this stuff because I liked saving old stuff, especially the fishing gear, and I took a lot of it home. That eventually came to an end and the shop was emptied and sold.

Then some years later there was a development quite close to the back of his shop on a laneway, they'd built a block of apartments down the laneway with the entrances into the apartments off the lane. There was an article in the local paper that the Port Phillip council wanted to put a name to the lane and wanted to call it Vautier Lane because it was running off Vautier Street. I wrote to the council - it was going to be gazetted and this article was to see if anybody had any objections to calling it Vautier Lane - I wrote back and suggested that they should call it Horrie Peacock Lane and gave them the reasons why and a brief history. I got a letter back some time later that

they agreed to do it, and then up went the sign. I poked my chest out and felt pretty happy about that.

**15:30**

**SR:** Horrie Peacock was a character for you, was he well known by others?

**RB:** Yes he was held in high regard by the whole street. He was always busy, there was always a pile of bikes which he used to park in the gutter outside the shop. This caused some consternation after a while because they'd be two and three and four deep and it was blocking the cars from parking and the council got quite upset about this. So he then drilled some holes into the bitumen footpath and put steel posts in and a chain between them and he used to line all his bikes up there, which of course decreased the size of the footpath, and this upset the council. There was a fair bit of angst about it for quite some time but he eventually won by the fact that he'd only have one or two bikes there and the rest of them he'd have to store in his shop. And his shop was crowded, you sort of walked down a little channel. But yes he was held in high esteem.

He was a good sportsman. When we were cleaning things out we were finding medals, he had a lot of trophies from the golf club that he belonged to, and he had a lot of paperwork and awards from the St Moritz ice rink where he used to skate, and a bit to do with tennis. So he was a super-duper sportsman and a character of Elwood.