

Preserving Memories

A joint project of the City of West Torrens and the
West Torrens Historical Society Inc.



William 'Bill' Lawrence Clarke

A journey of music, fitness and signwriting

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In 1954, the Clarke family moved from Tailern Bend to Adelaide to a home at 37 Taylors Road (now known as South Road) Torrensville.

Now living on Henley Beach Road and having lived in the area for over seventy years, Bill has witnessed many changes.

As a child, he and his brother Graham would catch the tram to Henley Beach or head into the city to watch a movie. On the way home, they often stopped for a large milkshake at the Daisy Dell, located at the corner of South Road and Henley Beach Road. Sometimes, they would cross the road for an ice cream at the Blue and Gold Delicatessen, then pick up a few comics from Len Robert's Newsagency before heading home.

Bill started working at State Signs in 1962, coincidentally located in what was once Len Roberts shop. The Newsagency had relocated to the other side of Henley Beach Road, near the corner of Danby Street, where Blackwell's Funerals stands today.

In 1963, due to the widening of the South Road intersection, State Signs moved to 245 Henley Beach Road, operating out of an old butcher shop next to a residential house. The business is now located at 22 Bennett Street, Thebarton and run by Bill's son Kym.

After retiring in 2014, Bill leased out the Henley Beach Road shop to a print and sign company, Ezy Banner. Even in retirement, he can still be found there from time to time working in that same shop, at the same spot, and listening to the same music as he did around sixty years ago.

Over the years, Bill has also been involved in bands, football and gyms. He has met a mixed bag of people and characters, however, what he treasures most is the value of quality friendship and family.



Bill Clarke

Family background

John Charles Clarke (1883-1962) and Mary Pearl Harriet Turvey (1896-1984)

John Charles Clarke, Bill's grandfather, was born 4 May 1883 at Myponga to Thomas Lawrence Clarke (1842-1917) and Sarah Fergusson (1851-1939).

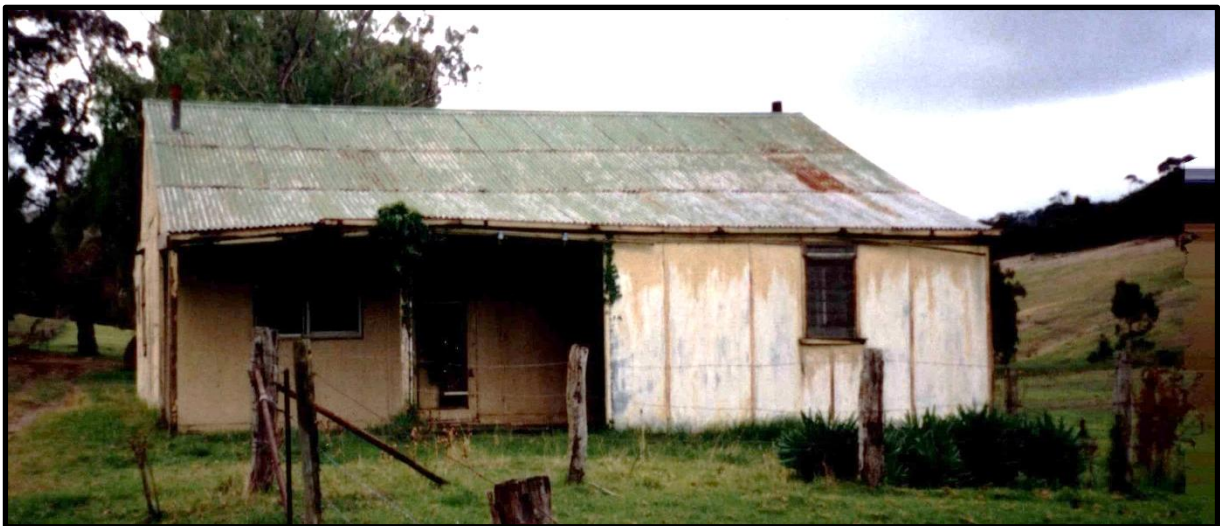
John married Mary Pearl Harriet Turvey (1896-1984) who was born 13 October 1896 in Bruce, in the north of South Australia. Mary's parents were Robert Turvey (1856-1934) and Margaret Brady (1858-1942).

John and Mary married 16 April 1917 at St Patrick's Church, Adelaide.

When John and Mary were farming on the Eyre Peninsula, Percival Royce (known as Royce) Clarke (24 August 1917-28 February 2003), Bill's father, was born in Cowell. The young family then moved to Inman Valley in South Australia.



*Margaret Turvey (Brady) with daughters Evelyn, Jessie, Pearl and Violet, 1910
[ancestry.com]*



John and Mary's home in Inman Valley, taken by Royce 1980s

John worked at the Myponga Sawmills in the 1920s and two further sons were born in Yankalilla. John Colin (Jack) born 24 April 1920 (died 29 August 2009) and Mervyn Thomas 21 October 1925 (died 17 April 2000).

Royce was enrolled at Hindmarsh Tiers then Myponga Primary Schools in the 1920s.

Their fourth son, Robert Lawrence was born on 3 August 1933 in the Kimba Hospital. He passed away on 26 May 2024, aged 90 years and 9 months.

Percival Royce Clarke (1917-2003) and Harriet Craig Dabinett (1919-2009)

Royce was a gardener, rabbit trapper and station hand at *Poltalloch* station, Narrung, near Lake Alexandrina, in 1937, when he met Harriet Dabinett, who was working there as a maid.



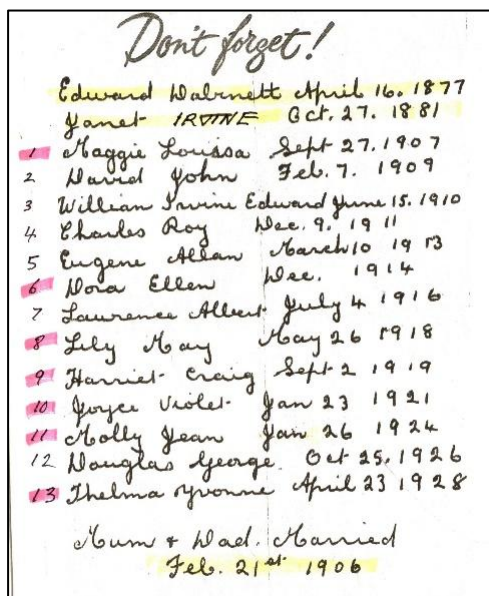
Poltalloch Station, Narrung

Harriet Craig Dabinett (known as Hettie) was born 2 September 1919 in Narrung, to dairy farmers Edward Dabinett (1876-1949) and Janet Graham Irvine (1881-1956).



Narrung family home

Hettie was the ninth of 13 siblings, eight girls and five boys.



Mary Pearl (grandmother), Royce, Hettie and Jack Clarke (uncle) at Murray Bridge Show, 1937

Royce and Hettie were engaged in October 1938 and married 11 January 1941.

DABINETT-CLARKE.—The engagement is announced of Hettie C., younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. Dabinett, of Narrung, to Royce, eldest son of Mr. and Mrs. J. C. Clarke, Murray Bridge.

Advertiser, 7 Oct 1938, p18

Royce and Hettie were living in Ashville when, in January 1942, Royce enlisted at Meninge for Military service during World War 2. Ranked as Lance Corporal, service number S52519, he was discharged on 5 August 1944.



Royce Clarke, 1942



Four generations at the 2002 Anzac Day Ceremony at Hilton Memorial Gardens - Royce, Bill, son Kym and grandson Adam

On his discharge Royce and Hettie lived on a farm near Kimba, but after about 18 months, the drought forced them to move to Hawke Street, Murray Bridge.



Hawke Street, Murray Bridge

Royce and Hettie had two boys. Graham Royce Clarke was born on 25 July 1941 at Tailem Bend Hospital and William 'Bill' Lawrence Clarke was born on 21 March 1945 in Kimba.

CLARKE.—On March 21, at Kimba District Hospital, to Hettie and Royce—a son (William Laurence). Both well. Thanking matron, sister and staff.

Royce worked for the Railways most of his life, starting at Tailem Bend and retiring from the Railway Yards at Mile End in 1980. Royce passed away on 28 February 2003 and Hettie on 25 September 2008.

Graham Royce Clarke (1941-2023)

Bill's brother Graham had an interest in radio technology, making crystal sets and fixing radios at home.

He became an electrician working initially for Plunkett Brothers at Norwood and then was a maintenance electrician in the new ANZ building on the corner of Grenfell and King William Street in Adelaide. For some years he was the technical, lighting and maintenance electrician at the Festival Theatre.

During this time, he took acting courses with John Edmonds at Theatre62, now the Star Theatres on Sir Donald Bradman Drive. His aim was to be a radio DJ and took courses to improve his voice.



Theatre 62, Hilton, 1979 [WTHS LH0377-03]

His first job on radio was in Broken Hill. He then worked in Port Augusta, which followed with a DJ job at Whyalla. When he returned to Adelaide, he was broadcasting on 5KA.

By the late 1970s, he worked all around Adelaide and was known as the Silver Fox (as his hair went gray at the age of 28). He was a top DJ at the Arkaba Hotel at Fullarton, and Rio's in Hindley Street.



Graham Clarke, radio DJ, 1970s

Graham survived a heart transplant in 1997 but passed away at the age of 81 from complications caused by the COVID-19 virus, on 10 June 2023.

Early Years

Before I started school, I can vividly remember running up and down Hawke Road at Murray Bridge with a piece of wire with a rubber wheel on the front of it, and the faster that wheel could go, the faster I knew I could go. I'm sure that is where I learnt to run, which became a great asset for my sporting venture later in life.

My older brother and I climbed trees and really enjoyed life. Graham was almost four years older than me, so I always had to try to keep up with him. He wasn't as keen on sport; he was quite academic.

Royce was now working for the Railways and the family moved to a brand-new Housing Trust house opposite the Tailem Bend Hospital. Tailem Bend was one of the biggest railway junctions in South Australia at the time.



Thelma Dabinet, Hettie Clarke with Graham and Bill



Weatherboard railway home, Tailem Bend

Bill started school at Saint Joseph's School, firstly at Murray Bridge and then Tailem Bend, and after two years, to give the boys a good education, the family moved to the city.

In 1954 the family moved to 37 Taylors Road, Torrensville and Royce began working for the Railways in Mile End. [Today Taylors Road is known as South Road. Taylors Road passed through the original Taylors Brothers tannery at Thebarton and went through to Henley Beach where it changed name to Fisher Terrace. Changing the entire road name to South Road also entailed renumbering and number 37 became 124 South Road.]



37 Taylors Road - now 124 South Road, Torrensville, early 1960s

Arriving at the Adelaide Railway Station

What an exciting time it was, arriving at the Adelaide Railway Station from Tailem Bend to spend a week's holiday at Grandma's house in Payneham. The moment we stepped off the train, the city came alive - the sounds of traffic, the clanging of trams, and the hustle and bustle of people all around made it a truly memorable occasion.

I can still picture Mum opening her handbag and pulling out the Box Brownie camera. A brand-new roll of film would be loaded, and soon we were striking poses as she captured the moment with what was, at the time, a marvel of modern technology.

Thanks to that little camera, we now have photographs that let us look back and reflect on those simple, wonderful days—our arrivals in Adelaide, the warmth of family, and the joy of childhood holidays.



Adelaide Railway station, 1948 - Uncle Bob Clarke, Mary Clarke, Royce
Front: Bill, Graham

School years

Graham and Bill attended the Marist Brothers School for the remainder of their primary years. This was on George Street, conveniently just across from their home on Taylors Road. Graham went to secondary school at Thebarton Technical School and Bill remained at Marist Brothers for his First, Second and Intermediate year.

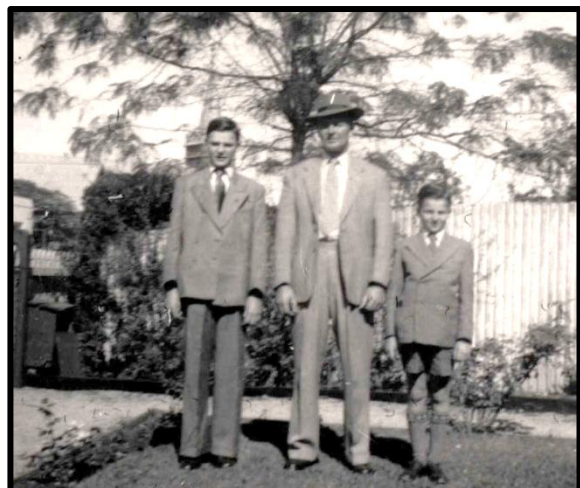
My father wanted me to go up to Christian Brothers College, but I thought that was a bit out of my league. I felt comfortable at this school, and I put my foot down and said, "No, I'm stopping at Marist Brothers. I want to stay here."

I remember there was the police station on the corner just as you came out of George Street.

In those days, the South Road, or Taylors Road, wasn't that busy at all. There were cars, but they would only come at knock off time and early in the morning, so there wasn't the traffic flow that there is today. We did have a back lane, which was fantastic because you could come in from the back lane and it was always safe to kick the football and play out there. We rode our bikes up and down the back lane. That's also where I taught myself how to run. I was known as the fastest kid at the school. I would throw a stone up and back over my shoulder and when I heard it hit the ground I would take off.



The family at home on Taylors Road, with the Queen of Angels church in the background, around 1954
Left: Royce and Hettie



Right: Graham, Royce and Bill

At school I did anything to get out of actual schoolwork. I rang the bell between the class changeovers, put out the school crossing flags, and did the ice cream orders for the tuck shop.

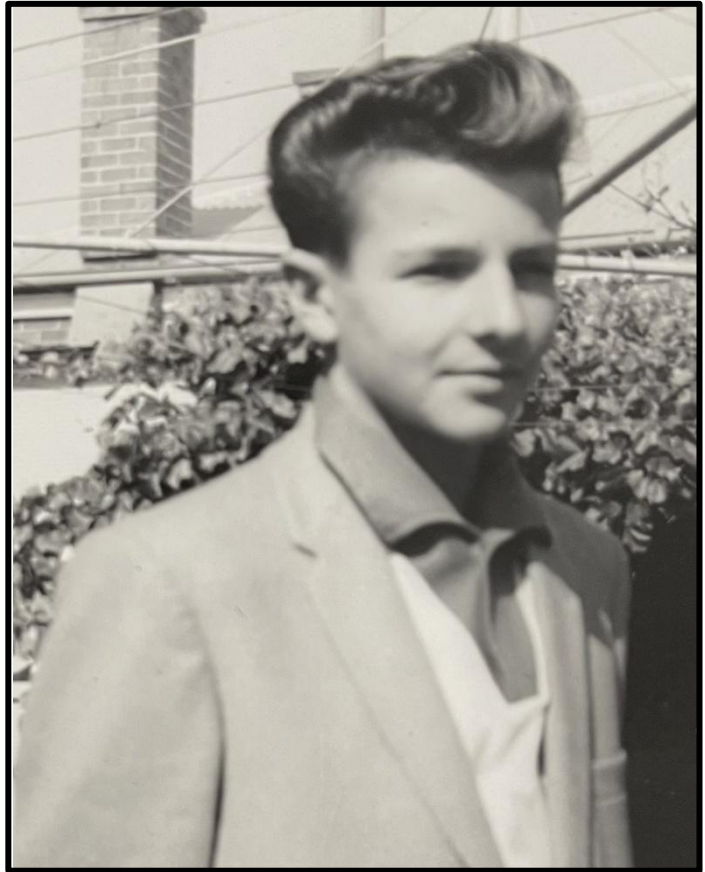
Saint Joseph Girls School was just down the road by the Queen of Angels Church. The boys from Marist Brothers Thebarton quite often passed the girls love notes saying things such as, "Hi, I think you're pretty" or "I'd like to see you after school at Mario's deli for a chat".

In my teens, I remember a blonde-haired Polish girl named Lucy who lived in Danby Street, Torrensville. She would quite often walk past my house.

I would shoot the window up and play my drums fiercely, hoping to attract some attention. But it didn't work, sadly she showed no interest.

Mary, who was my first girlfriend for some years, married Rob, a handsome chap a bit older than me. He had just purchased a new Holden sedan, and I was still riding my bike, so I wasn't in the race.

They're still married today, and we are still quite good friends, catching up at football or church.



Bill Clarke, 1960s with an 'Elvis quiff' hairstyle of the day

My dad was never one for having anything on hire purchase. Unless he had cash to pay for something, he wouldn't buy it. I remember being embarrassed when the ice man pulled up out the front of our house, to bring in a block of ice. All the other kids had fridges, televisions and everything and our family still had the ice man pulling up out the front. But that was Dad's way and that's the way it had to be. It took us a long time to get a television.

I would spend a lot of time at the home of my best mate from school, Brian Mulvihill. We were as thick as thieves, so I was always around his place watching television. I can remember when television first came in, we would go down to the shop on Henley Beach Road and watch it through the window. Brian and I stayed close - I was best man at his wedding, and he was best man at mine.

Around 1958, on a dirt track opposite where the IceArena is now on Port Road Thebarton, a group of Thebby boys would race most weekends. We'd wear helmets and leather gear, trying to look like someone from Rowley Park.

[Rowley Park Speedway was a dirt racing track from 1949 to 1979. On Friday nights crowds of up to 15,000 watched speedcars and bikes that came from as far away as the USA.]

By the time the 'upmarket' Findon Skid Kids became popular, I had one of the hottest bikes around with a small 18-inch wheel on the back and the big handlebars. I traded nearly all my comics for that small wheel.

Dad wasn't very impressed with that small wheel on the back, plus the bike only had a front brake.

Another school memory was hitching a ride to Morphettville Racecourse with my mate Brian Mulvihill and having a wager or two.

There were movies at Thebarton Theatre and Torrensville Plaza which is now an Office Furniture shop. Early on, I would go on Saturday afternoons with my brother. The girls played games and would sit behind us and put lipstick on our collar, then you'd have to nip home to wash it.



Bill with his 'hot' bike, 1958

Around 1964, Royce purchased a block of land at Tristania Street in Brooklyn Park, just behind the airport motel. A new house was built and the family moved in around 1966.



Sands & McDougall directory, 1966



10 Tristania Street, Hettie Clarke with friend Dorothy

Bill was 19 and lived here with his parents for around a year before he married.

Sports

When we first arrived in Thebarton, I can remember the kids asking me which football team I barracked for. I said, "I don't know". But when they asked me where I lived and I said "Thebarton", they said West Torrens had just won a premiership, so I should barrack for them. At the time, I thought, 'How lucky was I?' Not knowing it would take another 40 years, plus an amalgamation, before they ever won another premiership!

I was such a fanatical supporter. On Saturday, if I could see the Eagles were going to get beaten at Thebarton Oval, in the last quarter I would run home, hide in my bedroom, pull the blind down, no dinner, straight to bed!

While I was watching the Eagles training one night, Lindsay Head kicked the football over the fence. It hit my bike and twisted the seat to one side. I rode that bike for over a week before straightening that seat.

At school, I loved tennis, and I was captain of the football team, but athletics was where I excelled. I probably covered everything in athletics except high jump, but I was mainly a runner.

I can remember the first night at the Interschool athletics competition out at Norwood Oval. My father bought me a brand-new pair of sandshoes for the important event, but he had no idea what runners wore. I remember putting these brand-new sandshoes on. When I took off to run the 100 metres on the wet, slippery grass, I came practically last.

For the 200m I took the sandshoes off. My feet were frozen, and I could hardly feel them at all, and no surprise, I was beaten then as well.

Weeks later, my father bought a pair of second-hand spiked running shoes from Laurie Treadea's secondhand shop in the market. From then my running started to improve.

In my last year of school, I competed at Norwood Oval against all the hot schools, like Sacred Heart College, Rostrevor, Christian Brothers, Black Friars, St Paul's and Salesian College. I won the 100m, the 200m, the 400m, anchored the relay team and got third in the long jump.



Bill with trophies, 1960

While still at school, I played junior Colts and thirds football for the West Torrens Football Club, with players like John Graham, Brian Mulvihill and Russell Virgo.



Thebarton Oval with Coach Doug Cockshell, half time oranges, 1958



Eagles team 1958

Back row: GR Merry, BP Rankine, R Cashman, RO West, JL Hirst, R Scott

Third Row: W Coulter (Committeeman), JB Matters, IR Parkinson, BC Lodge, GC Lewis, RW Virgo, M Baltrope (trainer)

Second Row: TF Graves, JP McEntee, DA Duke, IF Oxley, JE Tregenza, PJ Clee, WL Clarke GA Sampson

First Row: Doug Cockshell, John Graham, Steve Annear (captain), Jack Bunning (management), Phillip Coulter, Warren Donald, Bill Busbridge (team manager)

Seated at Front: Teddy LeLue, Peter Wood

Much later I joined the management committee, as Player Welfare Officer. During that time, Rex Sellers guided us through the amalgamation with Woodville. I am now a Life Patron.

I still love my football and the Eagles!

A love affair with the FX Holden

I bought my first car after an unexpected stroke of luck at the races. That day, fortune smiled on me, and I walked away with a winnings of £280. At the time, my weekly wage was just £3 10s, so it was a significant sum—more money than I had ever held in my hands at once.

When I got home, I showed my father the winnings, beaming with excitement. He was dumbfounded, staring at the cash in disbelief before finally saying, "Well, that money can buy your first car." And that's exactly what I did. I purchased a black FX Holden for around £280, and from that moment on, it became the love of my life.



1949 FX Holden [richmonds.com.au]

One weekend, I went to the Mallala car races and saw a vehicle that looked strikingly similar to mine—but this one was a proper racing machine. It had a bold stripe running over the bonnet and the name Road Runner painted on its side. Nearby, another racing car caught my attention. It was a beat-up old thing with the word Junk scrawled on its body.

Inspired, I decided my car needed a racing touch of its own. The following week, I bought a leather strap to hold the bonnet down and, with a bit of cheeky humour, I sign-wrote Scrap on both sides of the car. I took off the hubcaps, painted the wheels silver, and lowered it four inches all around. The transformation was complete—I was incredibly proud of my car.

I would go cruising up and down Rundle Street, sometimes doing around 15 laps a night! I could feel the eyes on me. People were noticing Scrap, and I was loving every moment of it. Then, one night, as I pulled up at the traffic lights on King William Street near the town hall clock, something unexpected happened.

I glanced to my right, and there it was—the hotted-up racing car from Mallala, Road Runner itself. The driver revved his engine, the unmistakable growl of power echoing through the street. He wanted to race.

Then, to my horror, I saw him strapping on a racing helmet. My heart sank. I had never drag-raced before! My car only looked the part - it was nowhere near a real racing machine!

The lights turned green. With a roar, he launched forward, tyres screeching, disappearing into a cloud of smoke.

Meanwhile, I quietly turned left down Pirie Street and got out of Adelaide - quick smart.

Music and bands

My father always wanted his boys to get involved in music. My older brother Graham was taking piano accordion lessons from Ron Pearce, and I was around 13 or 14 when I was having drum lessons with Mick Drew at the Adelaide College of Music.

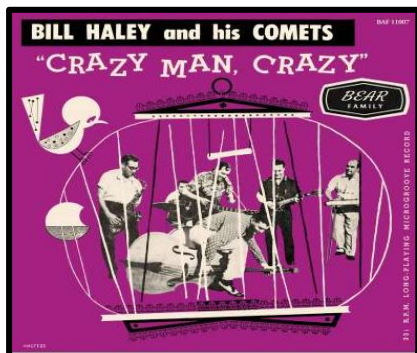
My first drum kit was purchased from Laurie Tredrea's secondhand shop in the Central Market.

Since Dad didn't have a car, and drums weren't allowed on trams, we had to take a taxi home—Dad wasn't happy, as the taxi fare was nearly as expensive as the drums!

Graham and I would perform at the school 'Learn to dance' classes, under strict timing instructions. We played everything from a 'Queen's Waltz' to a 'Pride of Erin' and a 'Military Two-Step.'



Graham and Bill, 1963



Graham had always dreamed of being a radio announcer. He spent hours in what he called his 'studio', introducing and playing records.

When the first rock 'n' roll album by Bill Haley and his Comets came out, he bought it immediately. When word got out at school, kids started coming over to our house and Graham would introduce the records and even get them to sing along.

From those early days, Graham was a star DJ!

Around 1959, Graham formed a band called The Sound Tracks with me on drums, Geoff Air on saxophone, and Vince Cirillo on guitar. I played my first gig on a Saturday afternoon at the Governor Hindmarsh Hotel beer garden, aged 16, while still in school. We also did evening cabarets at the Rosewater Hotel.

I remember one Saturday afternoon playing football for the West Torrens Colts at Thebarton Oval, thinking about what Graham had said to me earlier, "If you get injured and can't drum tonight, you won't be playing with us again. I'm sick of worrying all afternoon about whether you're coming home injured or if I have to get a fill-in drummer."

So, I thought 'bugger it'—I wanted to be a drummer. I never played another game of football again, but I've remained a diehard West Torrens Eagles supporter.

I joined a band called The Ramrods, with Phil Wooding (lead guitar); David McTaggart (bass); Andy Lawrence (rhythm guitar) and Ken Richards (lead vocals). We had a regular Friday night residency at the Semaphore Palais.

I then joined The Others, Adelaide's first rock/blues band, formed in 1963 by Ian Nancarrow. Ian was the guitarist and on harmonica and vocals. The group included Terry Redford (guitar); Roger Wood (bass); Dave Yelland (vocals) and myself on drums.

Due to work commitments, I was only with them for a short while, but the band went on to have a highly successful career, performing at major Australian music festivals and touring city stadiums, clubs, and pubs.



Ian Nancarrow [theothers.com.au]

The band released albums in 1980, 1998, 2004 and 2006. Despite road accidents, personal setbacks, and breakups, they became legends of Australian music under Ian's leadership.



The Others (Original line-up), Mick Bower, Ian Nancarrow, Bill Clarke, Dave Yelland, Roger Wood, 50-year Celebration, 2013

The Others recently celebrated their 50th anniversary at the Governor Hindmarsh with a full house of long-time supporters.

They've since been inducted into the South Australian Music Hall of Fame.

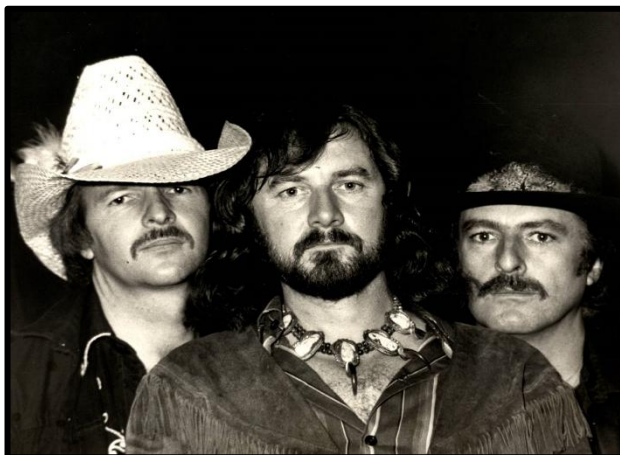


I joined a cabaret band my brother Graham had formed called REEB - that's 'BEER' spelled backwards! We played the Adelaide club scene in the late sixties and early seventies.

Most of our practice sessions were at someone's house, but we'd occasionally hire a room at Frank's Custom Music on Henley Beach Road. Graham left the band for a regular DJ job, so I managed the bookings. We played all around the state as far away as Ceduna and Woomera.

I took a year off from bands to focus on my business, State Signs, but was soon back playing night gigs in a country recording band, Company Blue. The band had a regular Friday night residency at the Settlers Hotel for around four years.

I joined the Jim Hermel Stone Mountain Band. Jim was a full-time professional musician who had just returned from touring America. The schedule was full-on—up to five nights a week, including touring. One of the tours in the early 1980s was with Reg Lindsay and included 23 shows in 19 days throughout the Iron Triangle.



STONE MOUNTAIN BAND: Bill Clarke (drums), Jim Hermel (lead guitar, vocals), Brian Davage (bass guitar, vocals) tour with Reg Lindsay



RAY MOORE BAND: John Martin, Bill Clarke, Bob Teakle, Ray Moore



THE WILD ONES: Trevor Read, Dave Kendall, Bill Clarke (fill-in), Ian Philip

As much as I loved it, after about two and a half years, I had to step back as I had a business to run... so, it was back to State Signs for me.

I continued to play in many bands, but in 2018, after fifty years and I estimate well over 2,000 shows, I played my last public show.

Bands over the years

Band	Band Leader
The Sound Tracks	Graham Clarke
The Ramrods	Ken Richards
The Others	Ian Nancarrow
REEB	Bill Clarke
Company Blue	Rick Adams
Stone Mountain Band	Jim Hermel
The Zensationals	Zen Tusim
Ray Moore	Ray Moore
Mal Rice	Mal Rice
Tex Ernie & Rita	Bob Teakle
Country Mile	Bob Basley
Wired for Sound	Arnold Grey
Wild Oats	Carole Sturtzel
The Wild Ones	Dave Kendall
City Cowboys	Peter Simons
Big Picture	Peter Simons
Key Country	Judith Waugh
Rock'n Dally Roo's	Judith Waugh
Fiesta Red	Mike Brady
Party Cats	Peter Tilbrook
The Twilight Zone	Peter Tilbrook



THE SOUND TRACKS - Geoffrey Air, Bill Clarke, Graham Clarke, Terry McKenzie



REEB - Graham Clarke, John Saunders, Bill Clarke, Dennis Stratford



John Saunders (vocals, guitar) Bill Clarke (drums), Peter Simons (piano), Graham Davidge (lead guitar fill-in), Dennis Stratford (bass) – taken at Convention Centre Tapleys Hill Road, 1974

Preserving Memories

William 'Bill' Lawrence Clarke



THE OTHERS: Mick Bower (fill-in), Ian Nancarrow, Bill Clarke, Dave Yelland, Roger Wood.



Carole Sturtzel and the Wild Oats



Johnny Mack and the City Cowboys



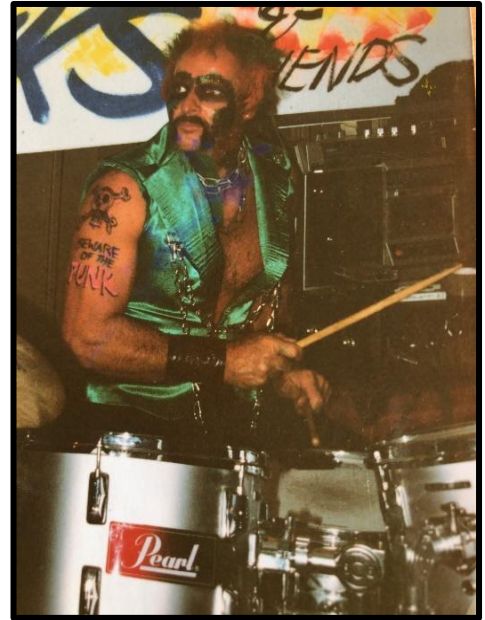
PARTY CATS: Schutzenfest on West Terrace, Adelaide



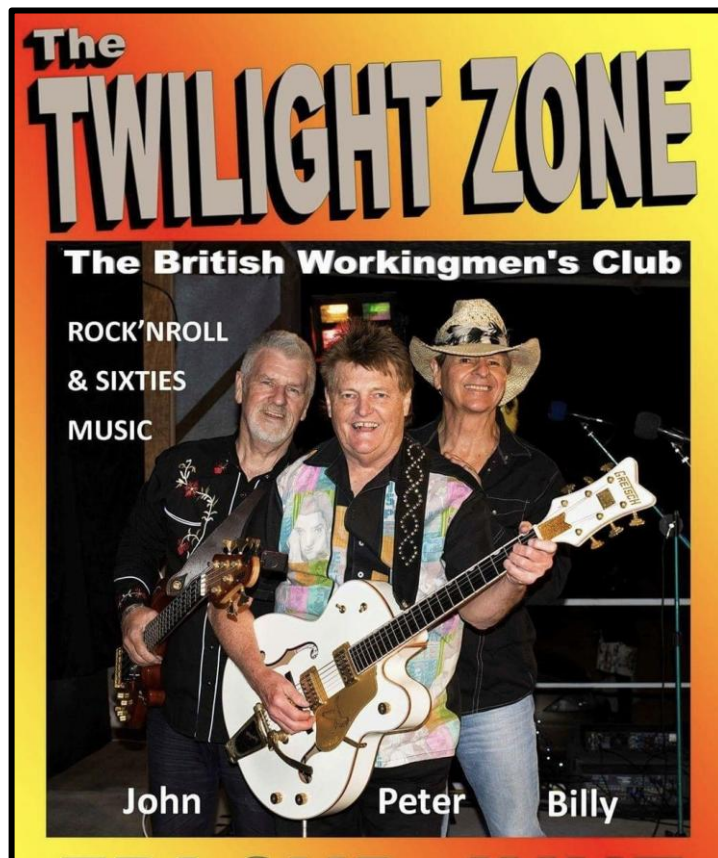
Peter Tillbrook John Bywaters Bill Clarke, 2014



COMPANY BLUE: Bill Clarke, John Martin, John Boswell, John Forrest, Rick Adams



Bill Clarke, Punk Band - New Years Eve dress-up



As part of an exhibition of Adelaide rock memorabilia of the 1960s and 70s, the State Library of South Australia staged a concert featuring The Twilight Zone (Peter Tilbrook ex Masters Apprentices on vocals and guitar / John Bywaters ex-The Twilights on bass / Billy Clarke from The Others on drums) in the library's forecourt on the evening of 17 February 2014.

This is their performance of one of The Twilights' biggest hits.

[Google search: The twilight Zone Needle in a Haystack live 2014](#)

Early Job Hunting

I had various jobs during my school years, washing bottles at a chemist on Port Road and selling newspapers from in front of our house on Taylors Road.

A newspaper cost two pence and if I was given a three penny coin I gained a penny as a tip!

I was also a 'tray boy' selling chocolates and dandies (vanilla ice-cream in a small cup) at The York and then Regent Theatre in the city. One night at the Regent Theatre with my good mate Brian Mulvihill, we loaded our trays with extra chocolates and dandies, but we misjudged the timing for the interval. Brian was on one side of the theatre, and I was on the other.

I heard this almighty crash. Apparently, Brian's strap cut into his shoulder, and he had fainted, which sent dandies and chocolates tumbling down the aisle. As a result, poor Brian's money takings at the end of the night were well down.

My father and I always thought I would either become a mechanic or a carpenter. I can clearly remember catching a bus with him, since Dad didn't have a car, to go for an interview at Islington Railway Yards.

My school report wasn't great, and after the interview, Dad didn't seem very confident about me getting an apprenticeship there. We stood outside the Reephram Hotel, waiting for the bus, while Dad looked over my report card.

He sighed and said, "I don't think we're getting anywhere with this." Then, right in front of me, he tore it up. I watched the pieces fly off into the paddock, and I thought, 'Thank goodness for that! That's out of the way now.'

Not long after that, Dad came home one night with some news...

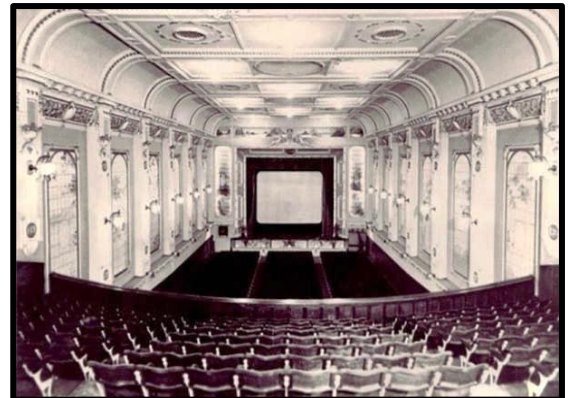
"I called into a sign shop on Henley Beach Road today," he said. "They do signwriting. You're very good at art and drawing, so I spoke to a chap named Colin White. He said he'd like to see you for an interview."

I went down to State Signs and met Colin White. He told me, "We've just taken on an apprentice, but we could employ you as an improver—just not as an apprentice."

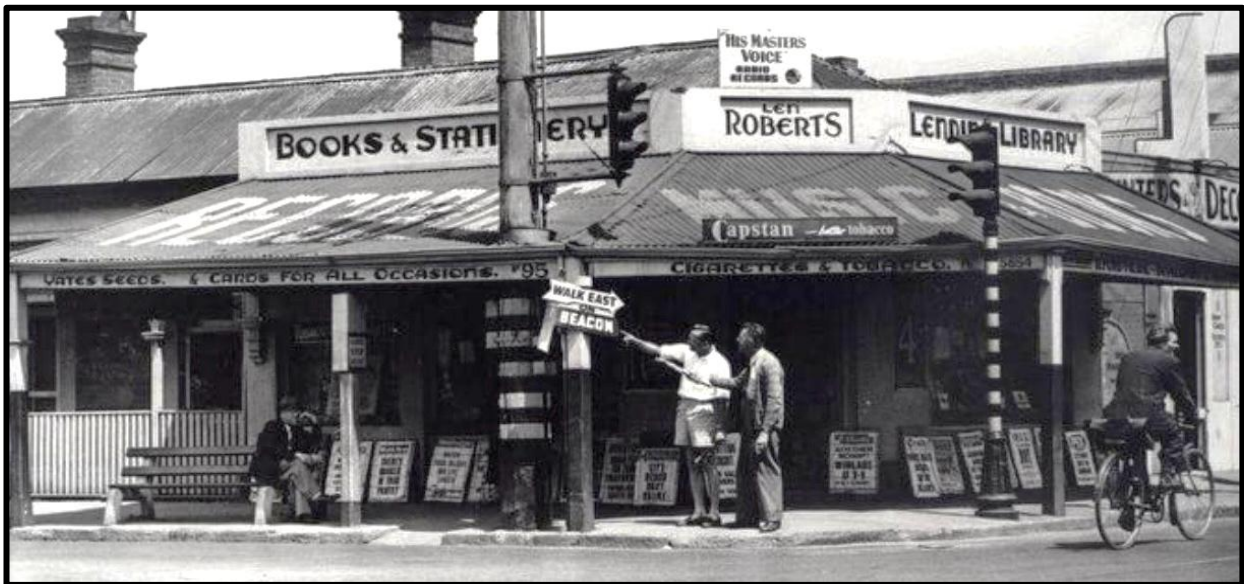
I didn't care - I was over the moon. I had a job!



*The York Cinema and foyer, Rundle Street
[Adelaideaz.com]*



Inside of Regent Theatre [maps.cityofadelaide.com.au]



Len Roberts Bookshop, 95 Henley Beach Road, Mile End

At that time, 1962, State Signs was at 95 Henley Beach Road, on the corner of Fisher Terrace (now South Road), Mile End, in a building that used to be Len Roberts Newsagency and Bookshop. Len Roberts had moved across the road to the corner of Danby Street, where Blackwell's Funeral Services is today. I remember it was near the Blue and Gold Deli and I could walk to work.

[From 1883 to 1965 the road connecting Henley Beach Road with Rowland Road to the south (now Sir Donald Bradman Drive) was named Fisher Terrace. North of Henley Beach Road, the current South Road was known as Taylor's Road from around 1919 to the 1960s.]

Fisher Ter	
95	State Signs signwrtre
95a	Unknown
97	Unknown
99	Unknown
101	General Industries Ltd
101	Meisters Ltd manfr dom
	hldr & agric imp-
	lements
105	Mile End Aviaries
105	Mitchells Catering Serv
107	Barrett & Barrett Ltd
	furn sale rms
109	Colella D fish shop
109	Colella V A mtl fisher

Sands and McDougall directory, 1962

HENLEY BEACH RD	
North side	
from Taylor's rd	
106	Daisy Dell Milk Bar
106	"Tobacco Box"
106a	Lipson S mens wear
108	Friendly Societies' Mdel
	Assocn (chmsts)
108	Raud R mngr
110	Acme Shoe Store Ltd
110a	Hender L & L wchmkr
	Town Hall Car Park
112	Thompson R hdrar
112a	Papas L chlds wear
114	Hunts Beauty Salon
	Thebarton Town Hall
	& Picture Theatre
114a	Hewitt F frst
114b	Papas L tailor
	Church of Christ
	Danby st
116	Roberts Len nwsagnt
116	Lusls J & M dictan
116	Meers J

The Evolution of State Signs

In late 1962 State Signs moved to 245 Henley Beach Road, which was previously a butcher shop, with a house next door. The business went on to operate from that location for fifty years.

Since I hadn't done a formal apprenticeship, I had to watch and learn from the more experienced signwriters. I had two excellent mentors, Brian Munro and Colin White, who not only possessed traditional signwriting skills but also had charm and charisma when dealing with clients. I recall thinking, 'Wow, if only some of that would rub off on me, I reckon I could do this.'

I observed how they spoke with customers, carefully listening and taking notes. After a while, I thought, 'Yeah, I I can do this.'

I took over the business in 1972 and retired in 2020 after nearly 38 years.

Since my retirement, my son, Kym Clarke, has owned and run State Signs.



Barry Heden. Graham Cooper, Brian Munroe, Colin White, Dennis Obst, Bill Clarke, 245 Henley Beach Road, 1965



Bill's workshop, after renovations, 245 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville, early 1990s

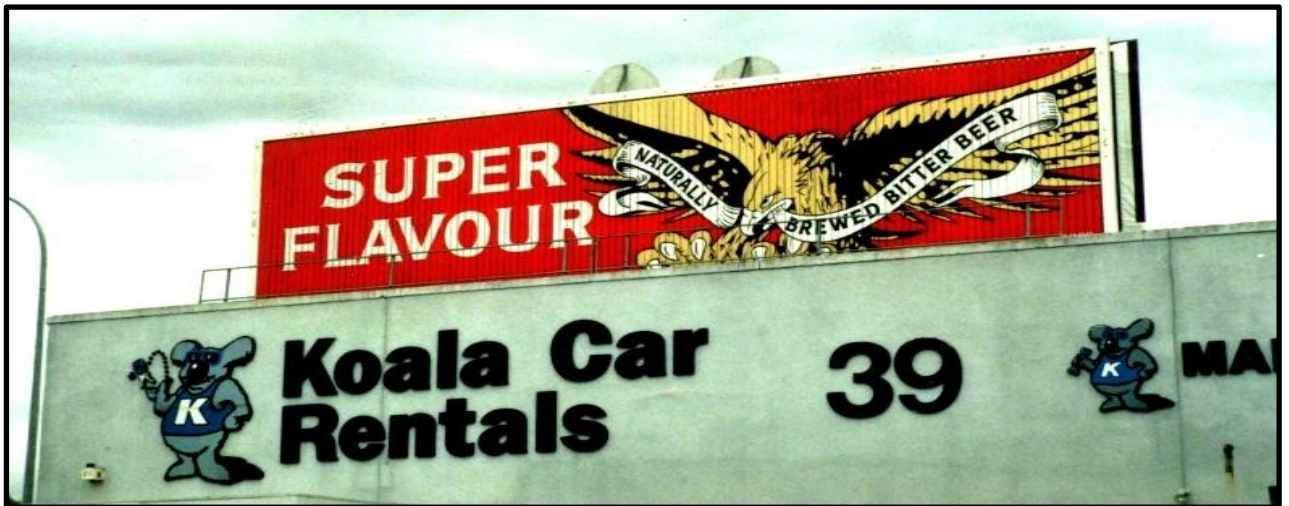
State Signs work and contracts

In the 1960s, most signs were done on-site, with hand-sketched designs presented to clients for approval before work began.

Some of the major contracts included Balfours Cakes, Peters Ice Cream, Pepsi Cola, and Amscol Ice Cream.

By the 1980s, State Signs had gained many new major contracts, including sporting clubs and grounds, West End, Sip'n Save and Booze Brothers.

In the early days the majority of the work was hand-painted.



Revolving 'Super Flavour' panels, hand painted with grid scale, late 1980s



Master Tanks, 230 Richmond Road still has the 1966 hand painted signwriting done by Barry Hedon, Brian Munro and Bill Clarke



*Painting on shop windows required working in reverse and painting from the inside of the building
Cornel's 135 Henley Beach Road, early 1980s*



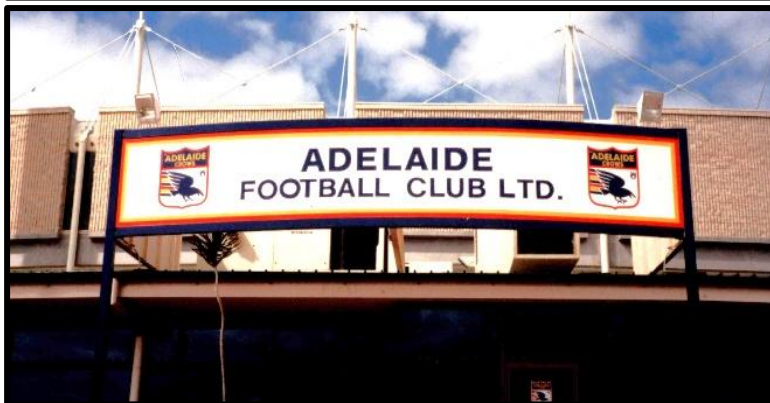
Traditional hand painted canvas banner, late 1980s



Touching up Screen-printed vinyl banners in the workshop



Hand painted directly onto the fascia of the Adelaide Football Club Oval, West Lakes, circa 1996

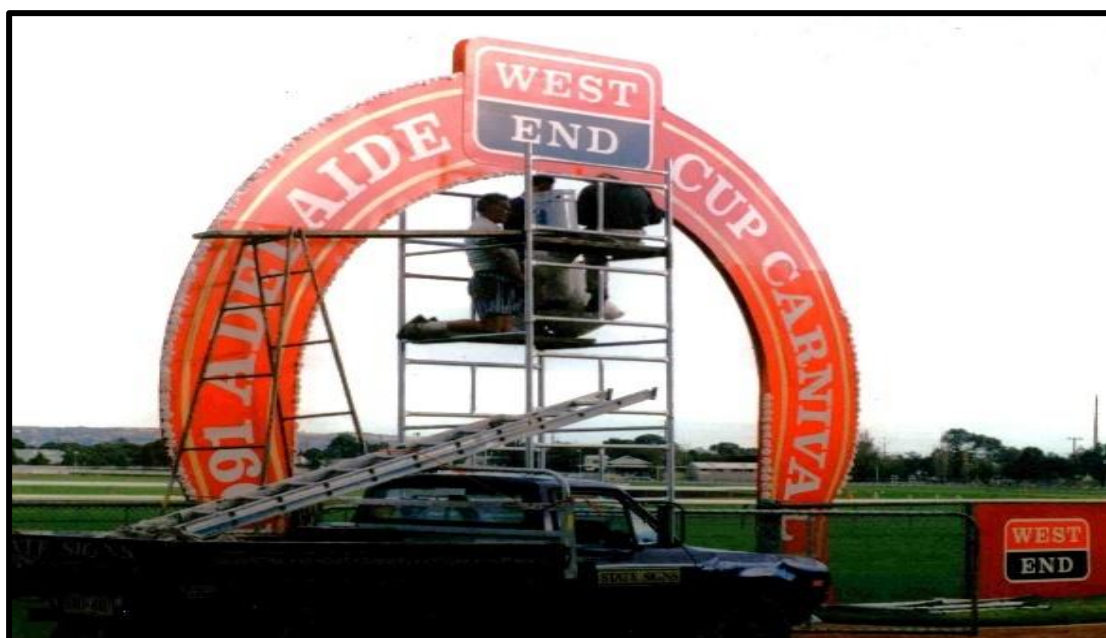


Office Entrance, hand painted, late 1990s



The 'Showdown' sponsors approached me to produce a trophy for the first Port Power vs Crows Showdown. I remember them saying "Don't go to too much trouble because they'll probably only ever play one Showdown." A cup was purchased from a trophy shop, and we applied a 'Showdown' logo. Not bad since they just played their 58th Showdown last week. (July 2025)

First SA 'Showdown' Football trophy, 1997



Adelaide Cup Carnival horseshoe, vinyl cut lettering, Morphettville Racecourse, 1991



Kent Town Silos, early 1980s, painted on ground and lifted in place by crane [since demolished and now site of apartments]

As traditional signwriting began to be phased out, State Signs was one of the first sign shops in South Australia to invest in, and use, a computerised vinyl print-and-cut lettering machine.

This allowed the business to continue offering high-quality signage still at competitive prices.



Vinyl cut lettering on verandah and metal Eagle Blue sign fixed to West Thebarton Hotel, early 1990s

Staff and apprentices

Over the years, 1962 to 2020 more than 80 people have worked at State Signs, including 14 apprentices. Bill proudly recalls that three of his apprentices—Geoff Hupfield, Angelo Kontibas, and Kym Smith—won Apprentice of the Year.

Geoff won best signwriting apprentice over four consecutive years, then went on to win the SA Technical and Further Education college medal. In 1984 winning a Queensland Overseas Foundation Scholarship allowed Geoff to travel and work alongside teams within many of America's famous theme parks for up to two years. He studied the merging of traditional signwriting skills and CAD systems with large format printers. He was instrumental in the introduction of large format printers into Australia along with implementing software training to the signwriting apprenticeship curriculum.

A key figure at State Signs was Mick Mulvihill, a sign erector, problem solver, and good friend. Mick was with the company for over forty years.

Bill's wife, Dianne, played a crucial role as the business manager, handling clerical work and liaising with customers—an invaluable asset to the business. Other key staff were Elizabeth, Julie Schapel and Wendy Clarke.

Bill was President of the Signcraftsmen's Association of SA from 1985 to 1987.



*Signcraftsmen's Association Members Back: Ron Hartly, Unknown, Phil Nichols, Fred Elder, Brian McDonald
Front: Malcolm, David Thorn, Bill Clarke, Unknown, Bill Morris*



A traditional Sign writers workshop wall, apprentice Glen Soper

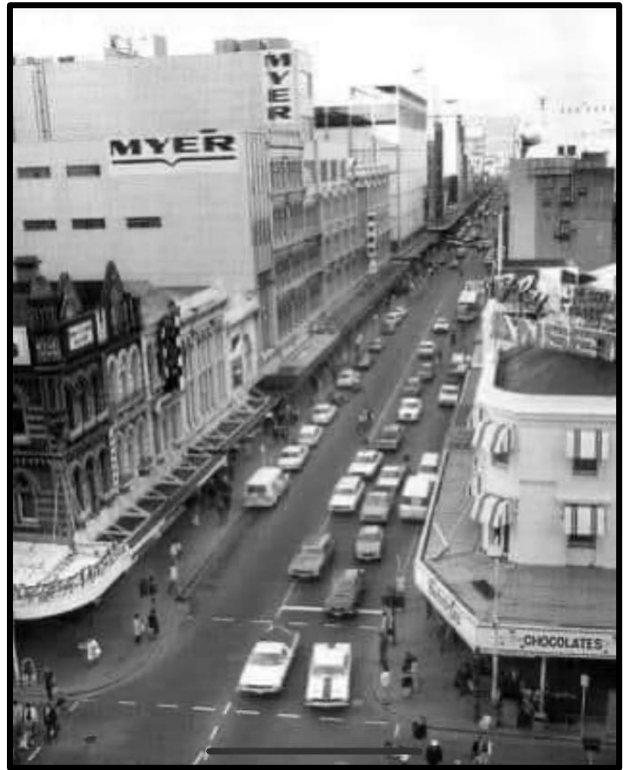
Memorable Projects

One of the challenging hand painted jobs was the sign on the Myer building in Rundle Street, before it became Rundle Mall in 1976.

The side wall was hand-painted by myself and a signwriter from Western Australia named Stan.

I recall Stan saying, "We'd better have a pint of beer at the Red Lion Hotel before going up there."

The two of us were lowered over the side of the building on makeshift scaffolding, controlled by a hand winch. Not many safety regulations in those days!



Myer sign, hand painted by Bill and Stan whilst being suspended from the top in a Bosun Chair



Bill Clarke, painting the West End logo on Chimney with son Kym, 1987

Painting the chimney stack at the West End Brewery on Port Road was another proud moment for me.

Each year after the SANFL grand final the Premier's and Runner-up's colours were painted up on the top of the chimney.

Working with my son Kym, we hand painted two massive West End logos on the structure under the grand final team stripes.

Marree Man

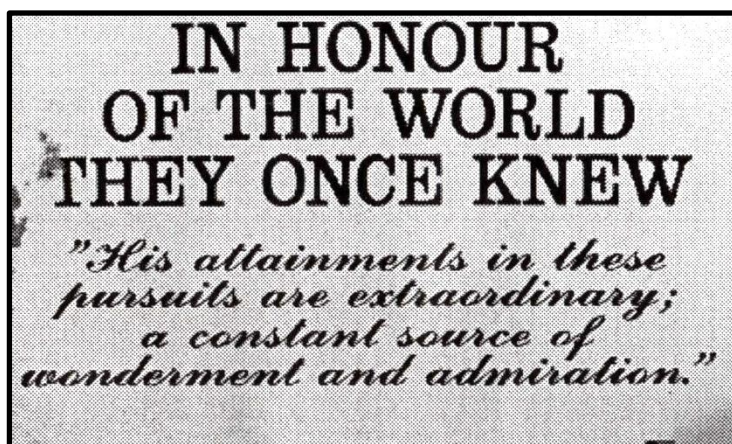
Discovered in 1998 from aerial footage, the Marree Man, a large four-kilometre-long carving etched deep into the red earth, shows an indigenous man hunting with a boomerang or stick. It is 60km west of Marree and 12 km northwest of Callana and covers an area of 2.5 sq km. Whilst its origins are mysterious, it is clearly man-made. In January 1999 a dedication plaque was found buried south of the nose of the figure. [Wikipedia]



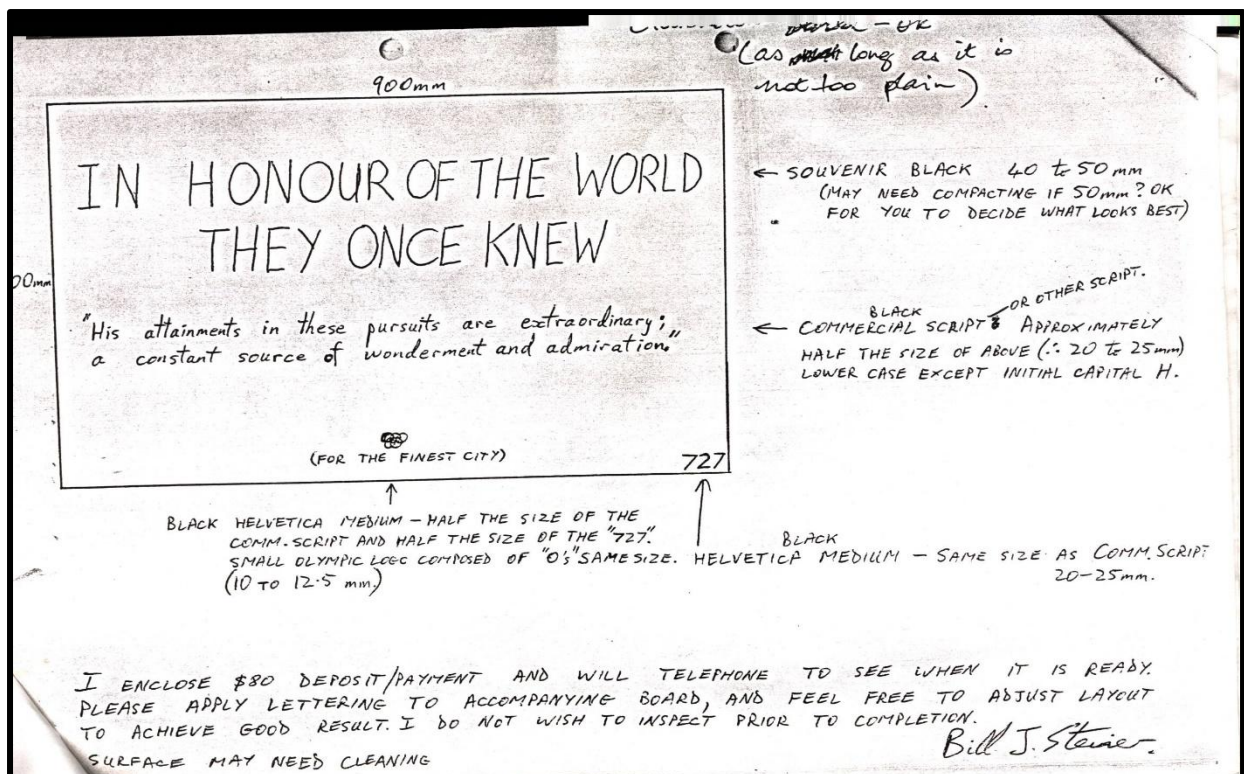
Aerial view of the Marree Man

The plaque found on the site was made at State Signs.

In April 1997 a gentleman called in and ordered a sign from a hand-written draft, which I kept on file.



Plaque found near the nose of the figure of the modern geoglyph



Original draft order for Marree Man plaque

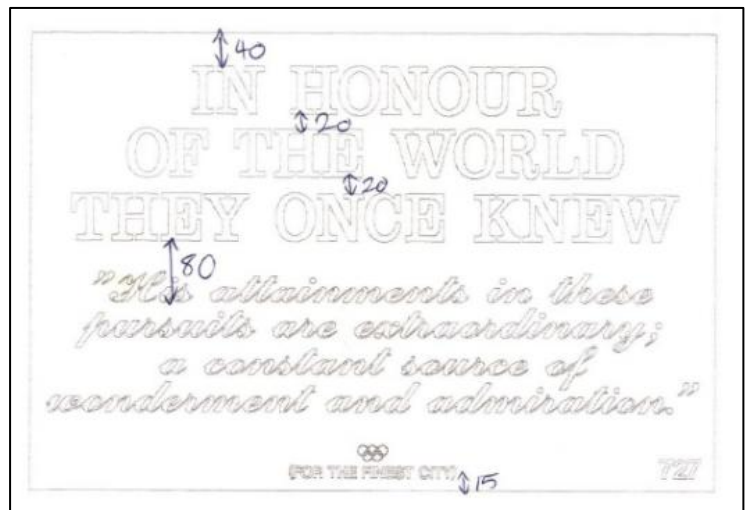
When he came back a few weeks later, he paid with a money order. I could hear the gentleman talking to our secretary and I came out of my office, curious to see this chap who had ordered a sign with such unusual wording.

He was a tall distinguished, well-dressed gentleman, with grey hair and a beard. His car was parked in front of our office. I said to him, "Flash car." He replied, "It's a hire car. I am heading to the airport." He thanked me for the sign in a very upper-class, English accent.

I watched him drive away, thinking, 'This is all very strange.'

Nearly two years later we received an email stating that the plaque that had been found buried near the nose of the Marree Man, had been produced by State Signs, Henley Beach Road.

I then had Channel 9 knocking on my door for an interview for The News that night. Sometime later Dick Smith also phoned me for information in an attempt to solve the mystery, but he also ran into dead ends.



*State Signs Artwork for plaque (above)
Cash Sale Invoice for the Job (below)*

He had suggested that we fly to the Marree Hotel to speak with the manager. I checked out the hand-written signs and menu boards around the hotel (after all I was a sign writer!) and there was a similarity in the handwriting and the draft I had been given for the Marree Man plaque.

In my view, there is a group of people who have done a great job keeping the Marree Man a mystery but maybe they had help from some major players?

STATE SIGNS PTY LTD A.C.N. 007 837 103 245A HENLEY BEACH ROAD TORRENSVILLE S.A. 5031 PH (08) 434422 FAX (08) 2341451						
INVOICE				INVOICE No. 26743		
SOLD TO:				SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:		
CASH SALE				TO BE COLLECTED OUR JOB NO 9527		
DATE	ORDER No.	SALES TAX No.				
22 Apr 97	BSteiner	TAX TO PAY				
CODE	DESCRIPTION	QTY.	PRICE	TAX	TOTAL	
1	Signwrite Board (supplied) with message: "IN HONOUR OF THE WORLD THEY ONCE KNEW.....etc" as illustrated by accompanying sheet.	1	84.00		84.00	
1	Materials used: Vinyl	1	13.12	2.88	16.00	
*****ALREADY PAID - MONEY ORDER FOR \$80.00 RECEIVED WITH THANKS*****						
TOTALS				2.88	86.88	

Karate, weight training and body building

I was introduced to weight training around the age of 21. I began training three nights a week after work at a small, boxing and weight training gym called Adelaide Physical Fitness Gymnasium, located downstairs at 38a Henley Beach Road, near an old snooker hall and the Mile End Hotel.

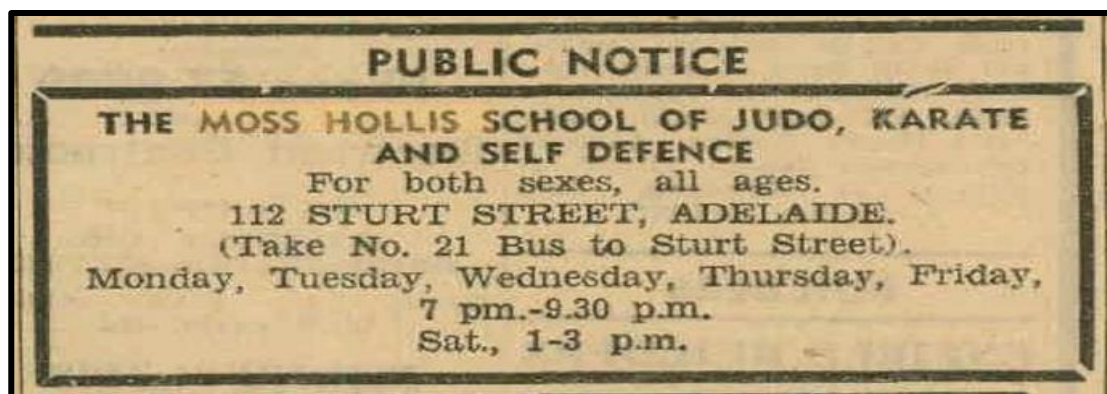
I had been lifting weights for some time when one of my mates, Ian Nancarrow, said, "You've got to start some martial arts training." Taking his advice, I started attending karate classes on Thursday nights at the Salisbury Youth Centre. Over time, I progressed to a Blue Belt but couldn't devote the time needed to master the techniques required to advance further.

During this time, I met a gentleman named Rob Dobson, who had come from Sydney to study at Adelaide University. Rob had competed in many freestyle fighting competitions in Sydney, and I was in awe of his technique. He took me under his wing and taught me how to freestyle fight.

An open competition was being held at Moss Hollis' School of Judo, Karate, and Self-Defence on Sturt Street in Adelaide. Rob encouraged me to enter, and on the night, I was holding my own against brown and black belts—until a punch to the head knocked me out cold. I was KO'ed. The rules stated that all punches to the head had to be pulled, but clearly, that wasn't the case this time. I'll never know—maybe the Blue Belt was doing too well? Either way, it was back to weight training for me.



36- 38 Henley Beach Road, Mile End



The Standard, Port Adelaide, 9 June 1965, p18

The Gym & Weightlifting Success

In 1969 State Signs relocated to 96 Hardy's Road, Torrensville, and 245 Henley Beach Road was transformed into the Torrensville Health & Fitness Centre, which I ran. The gym was open three nights a week.

Around this time, the South Australian Weightlifting Association was looking for a new home to temporarily store their weights.

I offered them space at the gym, with the condition that their members could train there for free - as long as we could also use the weights. Deal done.



One Saturday morning, the Junior State Weightlifting Titles were held at our gym. Among the competitors was a young Dean Lukin from Port Lincoln, who won the competition quite comfortably. Dean went on to win a gold medal at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, lifting an incredible 240 kilograms.

Training & Judging

While running the gym, I was invited to be a judge for the South Australian Bodybuilding Association. Over the years, I judged nine Mr. South Australia competitions and, in 1983, the first-ever women's bodybuilding competition at McNally's Gym in Light Square.

I also trained three young university students who were all studying medicine. They later became doctors, and one of them, Dr. Geoffrey White, went on to be my local GP.

After three years, as I had purchased the premises, I decided to close the gym and focus on State Signs.



Judging Trophy, 1985

The Grunters

I joined the Grunters in 1983. They were formed originally in 1980 by former Essendon and Richmond VFL player Barry Grinter, who had moved to Adelaide to play with the West Torrens Football Club. The group became known as Grinter's Grunters, and their membership grew to over 20 men with diverse backgrounds and nothing in common except for their support of the West Torrens Football Club and the desire to maintain some form of personal fitness. There were printers, bankers, public servants, salesmen, policemen, mechanics, cleaners and labourers all meeting three times a week at the Thebarton Oval at 6am for a one hour fitness work-out under the guidance of Barry Grinter.

When the Eagles moved to Woodville, Grinter's Grunters moved to the Henley Surf Life Saving Club and continued their training sessions in the gym until the Life Saving clubrooms were demolished in 2011. By then the group was just known as the 'Grunters' and had moved to the Henley Football Club rooms. The group were still active in 2023, holding an AGM and electing officers each year. They were led by the Grand Grunter, and also appointed a Fitness director, Social director and Finance director. They used the name Grunter as a prefix to their names when addressing each other - they even had their own monogrammed clothing!

Who would have thought back in 1980 that such a social bond would be formed within this group to the extent that they had regular houseboat trips together, and several holidays on the Gold Coast, Hawaii, Bali and Phuket. Sadly, some of the original members have passed away and others are experiencing deteriorating health. Membership has now been reduced to just five, most of whom are now over 80 years of age.

Not being anywhere near as active in recent years, the five remaining Grunters still meet at the Henley Oval for a light workout each week and follow that up with an early morning coffee where they analyse the Football results and attempt to solve many of the world's problems!



Grinter's Grunters

Horse racing syndicate

My good friend, Barry Williamson, was the owner of BodyCraft Industries which built horse floats.

Barry had good contacts in the racing industry including Bart Cummings, Colin Hayes and John Hawkes, who, around 1991, was Adelaide's leading racehorse trainer. He suggested buying into a two-year-old colt, New Logic, with great potential. I then became part of an ownership syndicate that was formed from some local businessmen.

The horse went on to win its first three Group One races and was also one of the favourites for the Sydney Golden Slipper (at that time, the biggest and highest stake money race for two-year-old colts in Australia).

Sadly, in the running of the Queen Adelaide Stakes at Morphettville, the last before going to Sydney, New Logic broke down. Even though he went on to win, we were devastated. Our great visions, which had included hiring a Lear jet to go to Sydney for big races, purchasing more horses and making a comfortable income when New Logic was put to stud, were shattered.

Unbeaten winner of his only 3 starts - all at 2yrs



NEW LOGIC

NEW LOGIC is a brilliant winner of his only 3 career outings as a two-year-old, prematurely retired to stud because of injury. On his debut, he won the Listed SAJC Fulham Park Plate by 7 lengths in an excellent 57.5secs for the 1000m journey. After a three months spell, **NEW LOGIC** returned to racing with a 2³/₄ lengths success in the SAJC Century Handicap, on that occasion running 57.2secs for 1000m. At his final appearance, **NEW LOGIC** won the Listed SAJC Queen Adelaide Stakes, scoring by 2 lengths over 1100m in 1m04.8secs.

NEW LOGIC won his only 3 outings by an aggregate of 11³/₄ lengths. Of his enforced retirement from racing, trainer John Hawkes stated **"I am bitterly disappointed because he was definitely the best horse I've trained and could have been anything if he'd stayed sound"**.

His sire, **FRANCIS BACON**, won 12 races in Italy, and is a half-brother to the English and Irish Oaks winner **FAIR SALINIA**. He has proved to be one of Australia's leading sires with progeny earnings in excess of \$3.7 million, and offspring of the calibre of **NEW LOGIC**, his outstanding full-brother **NEW ATLANTIS** (10 wins, \$361,580, VRC Maribyrnong Plt-Gr 2, SAJC West End Breeders' Stks-Gr 2, VRC Coles New World Stks-Gr 3, Canberra Black Opal Stks-Gr 3 etc), and leading Stakes winners **CAMERONIC** (SAJC Goodwood Hep-Gr 1 etc), **SCORNVALE** (WATC Karrakatta Plt-Gr 2 etc), **EXPLODING WONDER** (SAJC West End Breeders' Stks-Gr 2 etc), **SCOTCH CAPER** (SAJC Birthday Cup-Gr 3 etc), **BRING HOME**, **LADY NAPLES**, **SABLE ZEPHYR**, **NOUVELLE** etc.

FRANCIS BACON is a son of the highly influential sire **SOVEREIGN PATH**, himself a son of **GREY SOVEREIGN** and sire of the very successful stallions **SOVEREIGN EDITION**, **WOLVER HOLLOW**, **ONE POUND STERLING** etc.

NEW LOGIC's dam, **YELETAH LAZAR**, won two races at 1000 to 1200m. She has produced 4 foals to race, all winners, including the multiple Group winner **NEW ATLANTIS**, a brilliant two-year-old unbeaten in his first 6 starts as a juvenile; also dam of **YELETAH SUPREME** (3 wins at 1200 to 1500m) and **STOCK TAKE** (6 wins). She is a sister to 4 winners, from the family of **MAGHERA** (SAJC St Leger).

FRANCIS BACON	Sovereign Path	Grey Sovereign	Nasrullah
	Fair Arabella	Mountain Path	Kong
YELETAH LAZAR	Eleazar	Chateaugay	Boboligh
	Princess Felix	Locust Time	Faith Of Peace
		King of Babylon	Swaps
		Peace Flight	Banquet Bell
			Spy Song
			Snow Loose
			King of the Tudors
			Babylon
			Pipe of Peace
			Sweet Victory
			Supreme Court
			Muscat
			Leica
			Beaucoup

1991 Service Fee: \$2,500

Brenton Wise (08) 373 2070, (08) 31 0090 AH.
Fax (08) 373 2087.
16 Ilfracombe Drive, Wattle Park 5066.

Sires '91 255

I also had knocked back a large amount of money for my share. Later, when it had been confirmed that New Logic had broken a pastern bone and would probably never race again, I remember (ex-jockey and racing writer) Robert Clark saying to me, "There you go Bill. That's racing for you - one day a rooster, next day a feather duster."

I wasn't that concerned at the time because I thought we would just go out and get another horse. I know now that to get another horse the quality of New Logic is about the same odds as winning X-Lotto!

Personal life

Music and bands have always played an important role in my life. One Saturday night, after playing with The Ramrods at the Palais Royal on North Terrace, I noticed a lot of girls gathered around the stage. One, in particular, caught my eye. She was an amazing rock and roll dancer and, 'a great-looking girl'. I thought to myself, 'How am I ever going to meet her? I can't dance like that.'

Two weeks later, The Ramrods were playing at The Sound Lounge, a coffee shop upstairs in Glenelg. To my surprise, the same girl was there, sitting by the side of the stage having a coffee. I pointed her out to the band's singer, Ken Richards, who said, "I know her! She works at Myer's as a beautician." Ken then introduced us.

Her name was Dianne Wilkins, and she was also a singer. She even joined our band on stage to sing a couple of songs that night.

And that was it! Eighteen months later, at the age of 20, I married Dianne, who was 17, at the Queen of Angels Church on South Road, Thebarton. For our honeymoon, we drove to Mount Gambier for a couple of nights, borrowing a car from my brother-in-law—since my much-loved FX Holden had not been cared for as it should have been!

Family

After 32 years of marriage, Dianne and I separated. In 1997, I met my current partner of 28 years, Deolinda 'Jo' Fewings.

Jo is from the Philippines and is the only girl out of seven children. She grew up on a farm but had the opportunity to study at a co-educational university in Cagayan de Oro City, run by the Society of Jesus. Despite earning a Bachelor of Arts degree overseas, she had to re-study in Australia to have her qualifications recognised. She then went on to complete a postgraduate degree in Social Work at Flinders University. Jo currently works as a case manager for the South Australian government. She has a daughter, Chevaunne, from a previous marriage.

Chevaunne is now married to Tom, and they have a daughter named Effie.

My son, Kym, and his wife, Wendy, live just off Anzac Highway in Glandore.

They have two children, Adam and Lauren.



Jo Fewings, Adam Clarke, Kym Clarke, Wendy Clarke, Bill Clarke, Lauren Clarke

Health Challenges

In 2005, during a routine colonoscopy, doctors discovered that I had colon cancer. I became an emergency case and was told I could not leave the hospital. I underwent major surgery, followed by six months of chemotherapy. That was twenty years ago, and thanks to Dr Geoffrey White and Dr Peter Hewitt, I am still here, grateful for every day.

Then, in 2008, during another regular checkup with Mitch Walker, doctors found that the pressure in both of my eyes was dangerously high. I was immediately diagnosed with glaucoma and required laser surgery. My surgeon, Professor Robert Casson, told me that I was only two weeks away from going blind in both eyes. The news left me in shock for a couple of weeks—but thanks to quick intervention, my sight was saved.

Giving Back

From 2012 to 2019, I spent seven years volunteering with St. Vincent de Paul. I did regular home visits, delivering food vouchers and clothing vouchers to people in need. I also worked at the St. Vincent de Paul Shop on Henley Beach Road.

My Current Lifestyle

Now that I've just turned eighty, I make it a priority to maintain a high standard of fitness. I train two to three times a week at Kelvin Huppatz private gym and Paul Rose's TTF Gym.

Surprisingly, I still find myself working from time to time at my old shop at 245 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville. I've leased the premises out to Ezy Banner, run by Seng Lim, who has become a close friend over the years.

I often end up working in the same spot, doing a similar type of work, listening to the same music I did over sixty years ago - thinking, 'How lucky am I?' I absolutely love it.



245 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville, 2025

Most evenings, I retreat to my soundproof man shed for a half-hour session on my drums, playing along to my favorite songs on my 85-inch TV.

I stay socially active by attending events like the West Torrens Football Club Past Players and Officials' lunches, Adelaide's Music Matters musicians' gatherings, the West Torrens Historical Society, and the Grunters Group.

I also make it a point to keep in regular contact with friends and family while supporting my partner, Jo, who is still working.

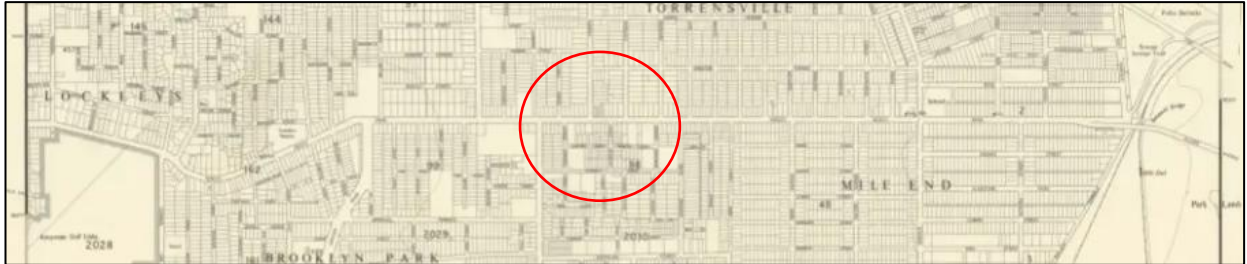


Bill with Deolinda 'Jo'

And, last but not least, I make sure not to neglect my health—keeping up with regular checkups to stay on top of things.

The notorious stobie pole!

Despite being along the straight stretch of Henley Beach Road, the stobie pole in front of State Signs has been the site of many car crashes. (Even when it was replaced with a tree!)



245 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville - accident prone!

The *Preserving Memories* project aim is to interview people who have lived in or had extensive connections to the West Torrens area. The West Torrens Historical Society Inc, in conjunction with the City of West Torrens invite them to share their memories and talk about the events and experiences which helped to make up their life's story. It allows us all the chance to reflect on the past and to preserve those memories into the future.

Thank you, Bill, for participating, and sharing your life story and experiences.

The initial interview was conducted by Graham Parry, a member of the West Torrens Historical Society. The opinions and views expressed in this interview, and documented in this transcript, are not necessarily the views and opinions of the interviewer, the West Torrens Historical Society, nor the City of West Torrens Council, and therefore neither the Society nor Council accepts responsibility for any comments or opinions expressed by the person being interviewed.

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