**Remembering Richard (Dick) Tooth**

as told to June Hall

Richard Arthur Edward Tooth was born 16 November 1921 in England to Arthur and Gladys (nee Biggs) Tooth in Boscombe, Bournemouth in the county of Hampshire.

His mother was the daughter of Richard Biggs, the local butcher in the suburb of Eltham – pronounced “Eltam”in the UK, but spelt the same as Eltham in Melbourne. His family always felt that was an interesting coincidence, Eltham being so much part of his life in Australia

His family, and Gladys’ sister Monica moved to New Zealand in April 1926 when Dick was 4. His father was a salesman for a carpet manufacturer looking for more opportunities. They lived mainly in Christchurch whilst in New Zealand, with over 30 moves in 8½ years because his father became a travelling life insurance salesman with T & G. Dick’s only and much-loved brother Neil was born there.

His father was such a successful salesman he won a free return trip to Australia. He then made the decision to settle his family here in 1932, initially living in Elwood, Brighton and Eaglemont before settling in Greensborough. They first lived in McDowell Street, then in High Street (later named Parkview Avenue). His aunt Monica (Thomas) also came to Greensborough.

During a bout of illness in 1934, Dick stayed at his uncle’s poultry farm in NSW and liked it so much he convinced his parents to move to Greensborough where he could have some chooks of his own. This was where his fascination with poultry began.

Dick started with about 10 chooks built up a stock of 700; he sold the surplus eggs to neighbours. The heat on 8 January 1939, 5 days before Black Friday, wiped out the lot.

This necessitated Dick going to work for Bob Stubley, the local grain merchant, in order to pay off his debt. He also had a 6-day per week job with a part time poultry farmer Harry Trist, who lived in McDowell Street.

Dick convinced Harry to buy a cow, which he milked. Harry eventually got rid of the poultry but continued with the dairy, building a modern dairy in Grimshaw Street, Greensborough by 1945.

Next Dick worked for Robert Hutchinson and Sons for 34 years, eventually managing stores in Preston and later Eltham. He continued in the stock feed business as a commission agent for a number of years.

Through it all, Dick received very little formal education at all, a few months at primary school in New Zealand and a few more at Ivanhoe Central School in 1934. He also went to Greensborough State School for a while, but because his parents were often ill he had to stay home and look after them. Although being quite a clever child, with so little education, it is astonishing what he achieved. He always said his education came from “*the school of hard knocks*.”

Dick enlisted in the army in January, 1942 and served until July, 1945. He met his wife Betty at the Victoria Barracks. Although they both worked at the Barracks they didn’t meet until 1943 when the Army took over the Melbourne Grammar premises, sending the schoolboys to the country for safety. Dick asked Betty out straightaway and the rest is history.

The couple were married in June 1944. Dick age 22, lived in High Street, Greensborough and Betty (Bridget) Mahoney 20, of South Yarra, daughter of Peter and Martha Mahoney, who arrived in Australia, from Tipperary Ireland in May 1920. Their best man was Bob Stubley and Maid of Honour Betty’s sister Mary (Fox).

When they were first married they were living in rooms in Darebin, then had a house built in Henry Street, Greensborough and moved in there during the Christmas of 1947. Once again Dick had his chooks and a cow and sold the surplus eggs, milk and cream.

There, their family lived and grew until they moved to Railway Parade, Eltham in March 1960. The Eltham property was 3½ acres, on which they established a poultry farm eventually owning 4000 laying hens. For all these years from 1948 to 1988 Dick also ran his own poultry farm, at home in both Greensborough and Eltham. He effectively worked two jobs.

Betty and Dick had 6 children, all born at the Diamond Valley Community Hospital, the first three, when it was situated in the old house, and the second three at the new hospital. Barbara was born in 1946, Julie 1948, Brian 1950, twins Jennifer and Pamela in 1957 and youngest Deborah in March 1960. Photo1

When the Diamond Valley Community Hospital opened its doors in February 1945, Dick, Vic Coe and Percy Stubley were three of the first members. Percy was there at the opening, signing up members. Dick was always proud to say that the DVCH was his hospital because, when the hospital first opened, he and Vic were the ones to carry in the iron beds and other furniture required.

After being in Eltham for 28 years Dick and Betty downsized to a house on a normal size house block in Allumba Drive, Greensborough/St Helena in December 1988. Betty who turned 90 in February, 2014 still lives there. They were still together after 57 years of marriage, when he died on 31 March 2001

Dick was always proud of his British heritage, cherishing his dual citizenship for a very long time. To his dying day he still supported the “Poms” particularly in cricket.

Dick loved being involved in sport. About 1946 He, Bill Cecil, Hughie Wasley, who became secretary, and others decided to re-establish the Greensborough Football Club.

Dick was Honorary Secretary of the highly successful Greensborough Football Club during the 50’s, when the ‘Boro won premierships in 1952, 1955, 1958, 1960 and 1961 and were also runners-up to Heidelberg 3 times in this period. He also later held the roles of Vice-President and the President with continued success. Dick was awarded life membership of the GFC and also life member of the Diamond Valley Football League with his son Brian. Photo 2

Dick joined the Greensborough Lodge of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes (the RAOB) in 1955. He became Secretary at the first meeting he attended and remained in that position for 35 years and a lodge member for 45 years.

Dick became a Justice of the Peace in June 1960, and sat on the bench at the Eltham Court once a week for 24 years. After the Eltham Court closed, he travelled into the city to sit at court but eventually stopped travelling there when violence on the trains escalated. At the age of 72, he was back catching the train into the city once a week, to sit at a table in the Family Court and provide his voluntary services to sign Statutory Declarations.

Dick was passionate about the Liberal Party and was actively involved with the local branch for 15 years. He helped in any way he could, handing out how to vote cards, he was also a scrutineer. He also helped and worked with a couple of Eltham Shire Presidents.

My thanks to Betty, and her family for their help with this story. Dick was an incredible man.