

A life of art and cricket

WYKEHAM Perry grew up on his parents' farm on the Buxton-Marysville Road loving cricket and listening to test matches in the 1940s and 1950s. He especially remembers coming into his teens during the 1948 Ashes, when Donald Bradman took a team to England with personalities such as Keith Miller and Lindsay Hassett that would become known as The Invincibles.

Mr Perry played cricket throughout his schooling and after getting a magazine called *Sporting Life*, which taught him about the slow bowlers of the 1930s Bradman sides such as Bill O'Reilly, he began to experiment with the ball and developed his leg break after much repetition.

Speaking at his home in Eildon, he said that he, "made up a pitch on the farm and I just bowled and bowled and bowled and bowled."

As a 13-year-old, he would ride his bike into Marysville to watch the cricket and before long, the team asked him if he would like to play. He began his first season in 1949 and would play all the way through to 1960 when he moved to Canberra for work.

After winning a premiership with Marysville, he was selected in 1953 for a combined Alexandra, Yea and Mansfield Cricket Associations team to play in Melbourne on suburban grounds as part of country week.

That Easter, he was selected again to play against a combined Carlton District Cricket Association which travelled up this way. In the first game, a 15-year-old Mr Perry took 6/22 with his leg spin bowling and his first wicket was of Herb Turner, a Victorian Sheffield Shield player, who he dismissed

leg before wicket. He also knocked off two more Shield players on his way to his career-best figures.

While he did have a terrific cricket career with Marysville, what Mr Perry is most known for is his artwork.

His passion started in primary school with pastel books and school artworks. Once he commenced high school, Mr Perry started illustrating project books about dairy cattle and poultry as part of his role with the Alexandra Young Farmers' Club.

"There were a number of people I pay credit to who gave me great encouragement, particularly my art teachers at the Alexandra Secondary College and there were private citizens in Marysville who also gave me great encouragement," Mr Perry said.

"In fact, my first commissions were by Mrs Barton who owned one of the Marysville shops and she commissioned me to do a couple of paintings and I got the princely sums of a dollar or two for my efforts."

Mostly self-taught, Mr Perry admired the Australian impressionists of the time, particularly Streeton and McCubbin, and considers himself fortunate to be able to have made a living doing what he loved.

"I think anyone who has a passion, perhaps acting or entertaining and painting, and can earn a living from it is very fortunate," Mr Perry said.

He entered a lot of his works into art shows that were run by schools or other organisations, winning quite a few prizes from doing so, along with some money from his pieces that had sold. His accolades include winning the Alexandra Art Show Oil Prize, the 1975 Camberwell Rotary Oil

Award, the most prestigious prize at the time, for a piece that is currently a part of the Camberwell City collection, and the McCubbin Award.

While previously, people could only afford a print, Mr Perry was fortunate that during the 1970s when traditional Australian art came back into favour, more people had disposable income and could start buying original pieces for a few hundred dollars at these local art shows.

The piece that won the Alexandra Art Show Oil Prize in 1978 depicts Mt Cathedral overlooking Taggerty and still hangs in the council chambers today.

Unbeknownst to him, Mr Perry's daughter would go around his studio and take photos of his works and after a trip to America she had a one-off book printed filled with reproductions of his work.

When he left school, Mr Perry worked at the National Bank until he took a position with the Citizen Military Forces, which is now the Australian Army Reserve, as part of his national service obligations and moved to Canberra a few years later.

He then returned to Melbourne in 1972 to take up a position with the Department of Territories in the CBD and took advantage of his location, making frequent trips to the National Gallery of Victoria to analyse the works of Australian impressionists and adapting it to his own style.

"I analysed how they achieved light and how they applied their paint and adapted that to my own particular style," Mr Perry said.

Having grown up in the area and moving back to his current residence in Eildon with his wife Wilma in 1978, Mr Perry loves the

area.

"You can't beat this," he said.

"It's mind boggling and you come through so many changes too. You come up the Spur with beautiful eucalypts and mountain ash, then you come through Buxton and it all starts to level out, you get into red gum and box country, then you've got the Goulburn River, which itself has beautiful river scenes, you've got Mt Cathedral which is an outstanding subject matter and then you've got Mt Buller just over the other side of the lake and then you've got the lake's foreshore and inlets with houseboats and little nooks and crannies.

"It's an artist's paradise and it's right on my doorstep. I count myself very lucky, firstly, to be born and raised in the Buxton-Marysville area and then to come back and I've been here ever since."

After struggling to juggle work, family and his art, in 1976 at age 40, Mr Perry decided to devote himself to his passion and left the Department of Territories to work on his art full time.

Mr Perry was painting up until just over a year ago, however he still might get back into it should he feel up to it.

"I'll have a go again," Mr Perry said, smiling.

"It won't be a commercial operation, it'll just be a hobby activity. I think you never lose that interest, but when you haven't got your youth it can make it difficult."

Just the other day, a lady asked if Mr Perry had any small paintings as she wanted to give them to her grandchildren so the demand is still there for his work.

Memories of school

MR Perry started school at Buxton Primary School in 1940, having to walk to get there. After a few years at the one room school, his parents moved him to Marysville Primary School which was even further away.

Just getting to school was often wrought with danger as there were many occasions in which Mr Perry and his siblings would hitchhike to school, jumping on the back of timber trucks without trailers and with nothing to hold onto but the cab.

"There was a slaughter yards just up the road from the farm and one of the Barton boys used to come down in a Jeep Blitz and he'd pick up the meat for the Marysville butcher shop and he'd give us a ride. We're sitting in the back with all these carcasses," he laughed.

Mr Perry grew up as the eldest of eight children and his parents weren't the wealthiest so there wasn't too much to go around, he said. At the time, only wealthy people could afford cars so he had to find his own way to school. Once he got older, his father bought a push bike that he used to ride to school.

Mr Perry attended Marysville Primary School until Year Seven, when Alexandra Secondary College started running a bus service that passed through Marysville and Buxton. He was there from Form One, where he was a bit older than the rest of the students, until he did his leaving, the equivalent of today's Year 11, in 1953. He was also prefect that year, the first at the

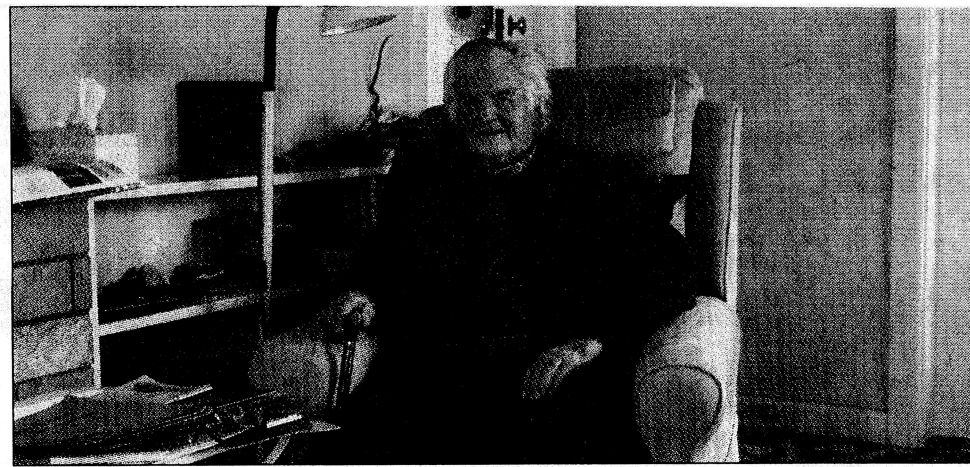
school's current location, on top of playing cricket.

There was no matriculation from Alexandra at the time unless a student did it by correspondence, which meant they had to study on their own. Mr Perry decided with his father to leave school to work half a day on the farm and do correspondence in the afternoon from a commercial organisation.

Mr Perry studied English expression, geography and Australian history that year, but he also spoke to Alexandra Secondary College's art teacher who had advised him to write to one of the universities and get their art syllabus. As part of the art course, he had to do a practical assignment and wanted to paint the Greek Parthenon, which the teacher said was "old hat" and for him to do something more modern.

"I got the syllabus and worked away on my own accord without any correspondence lessons for art. I failed the exam, the project book failed and so did the practical work," he laughed. When he moved to Melbourne for work, Mr Perry did night studies for art to get the extra subject for his matriculation and was going along swimmingly until he had to fulfil his national service obligations.

When he got to Canberra, he started studying at the Australian National University doing political science but it was too hard on his young family at the time and gave up his studies.



Wykeham Perry. -JR



Marysville Premiership Team 1959. Back: Wykeham Perry, Allan O'Brien, Neville McKenzie, Joe Greatorex, Jim Sherlock, Henry Hope. Front: Mick Greatorex, Ted Greatorex, Ken West, Harold Critchley, Les Perry. -Image courtesy of Bill Metcalfe, Marysville Historical Society.

