



By John Peck

## Women In Harness Racing – Pearl Kelly

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**MRS. PEARL KELLY**  
The first Lady Rider to compete on the Richmond Course.

PEARL KELLY  
(1894–1982)



Female drivers competing against men in Harness Racing in 2010 is considered normality, yet one hundred years ago there had not been one instance in Australia of a woman winning any registered race be it against the men or themselves.

Male administrators, and indeed male participants, made it all but impossible for females to compete in registered races, preferring to issue special licenses that would see them relegated to compete solely at shows and gymkhanas.

It took a combination of extraordinary ability and determination on the part of any woman in Australia a century ago to snare an opportunity to compete in betting events.

With no official records of Australian races in the 19th century, one has to rely on handwritten notes from newspaper reports and a smattering of Melbourne and Sydney results from Miller's Guide, nevertheless the 1,000+ results show no winning lady riders or drivers in that time. No doubt there were many on the Show circuit.

New Zealand did have official race results continuously from 1890 onwards and it is among the pages of those volumes that we find the pioneering Miss Isabella Button who both rode and drove winners at meetings at Geraldine, Ashburton, Timaru and Canterbury Park Trotting Club (at Addington), most times with the Young Irvington gelding The Fiddler.

In fact Bella Button, as she was known, won the first race at the inaugural meeting of the Ashburton Trotting Club in 1890, riding her own horses, Star, to victory.

Early in the 20th century officialdom barred women from competing at registered meetings in New Zealand so Bella switched her attention to the myriad of Shows competing under her married name of Mrs A. Moore (women were very rarely described with their own Christian name initials).

Tragically in February 1921 she was fatally injured when her show pony Patience reared, dislodging Bella from the saddle and on impact with the ground, Bella was killed instantaneously.

In her obituary Bella Moore was described as "fearless in the saddle and one who had broken in many horses, doing all the handling herself, had many times entered the ring in buck jumping competitions, and had proved herself a particularly good rough rider."

In Australia the first official keeping of race records was undertaken by the fastidious Napoleonic like figure of R.C. "Old Dick" Hungerford, the former secretary of the Greymouth Trotting Club who ruled the roost in a similar position of the NSW Trotting Club.

Hungerford produced a series of small hard bound red books that detailed results of all NSW meetings, including events at registered Shows from August 1st 1901 right through to 31st July, 1915.

In those books one can find the first instances of women competing in trotting events in NSW and it was the 1910 annual Hunter River Agricultural Show at Maitland that was the venue for the first women's trotting race.

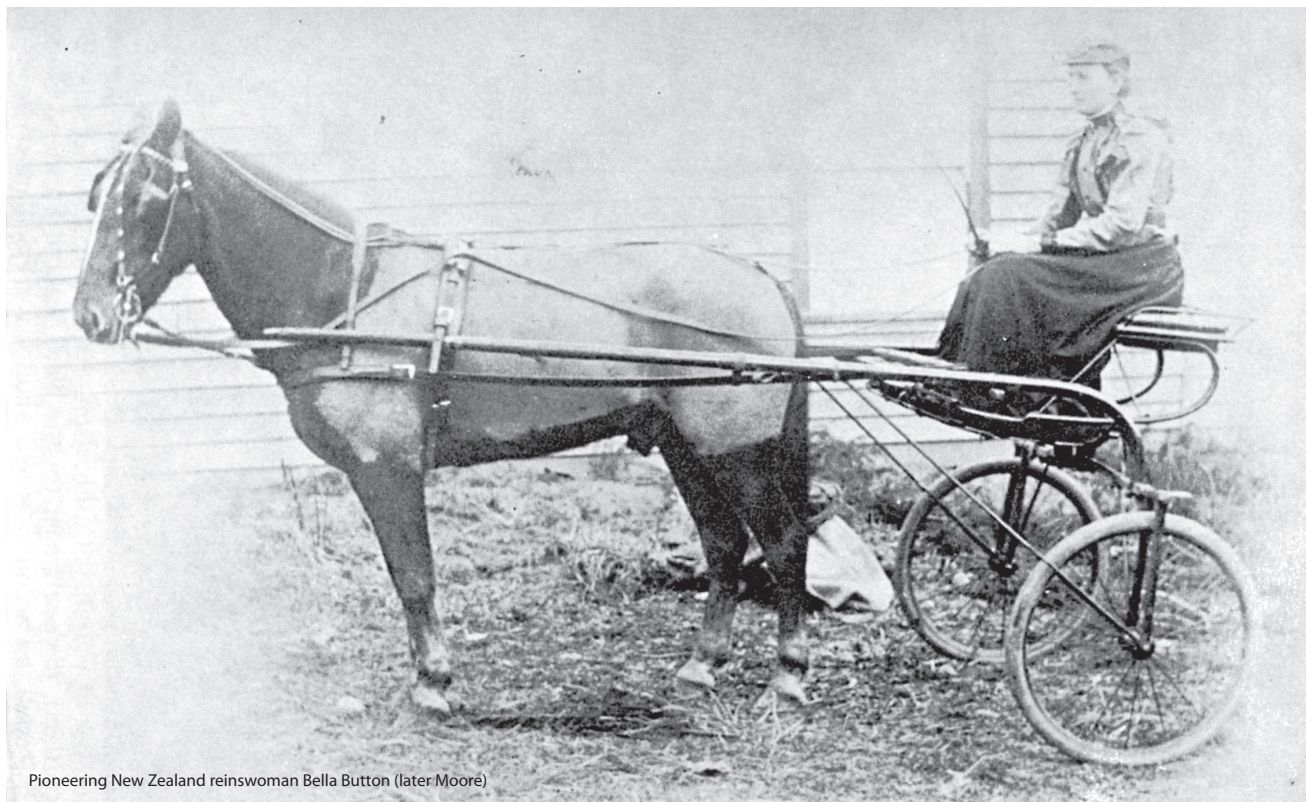
Women, however, were banned from competing in the metropolitan area (Epping aka Harold Park) of New South Wales and it would not be until 1978 before a reinswoman would drive in a betting race at Harold Park, but more of that later.

The dubious honour of the first ever women's trotting race goes to tiny King Island (north of Tasmania) that, at its annual show, promoted a Ladies Trot. The honour is dubious because the paper of the time reported that none of the horses had ever been trained on the trot.

Even discounting that, Tasmania still retains the honour as the first State where an all women's trotting race was run and won. This took place at the popular gymkhana sports meeting at the Hobart suburb angalloping track of Brighton when on 6th February 1907 ten young women, all riding in saddle, took part in a Ladies Trot. The winner was Miss Peggie Page riding M H A, with Miss Salier on Jealousy finished second.

The Hobart Mercury reported, "In reviewing the events, a good deal of interest was centred in the ladies' trotting race, in which ten young ladies had the honour of compassing the race course. They presented, before they were set going, quite a martial bearing on one line at the starting point, and the enthusiasm that prevailed was intense as they settled down to trot, evoking hearty ringing cheers as the ladies came in." This event became an annual fixture at the February gymkhana.

In 1908 the newspaper reported, "The ladies were particularly well to the fore in numerous equestrian events, and proved themselves capable horsewomen." And on this occasion Miss Trixie Blacklow won the Ladies Trot.



Pioneering New Zealand reinswoman Bella Button (later Moore)





Pearl Kelly at age 16

Despite the popularity of the ladies events with the public, so far as registered racing was concerned women were spurned and it would not be until the 2nd April 1924 before Mrs M.J. Tucker created history by becoming the first woman to ride at a registered trotting winner in Tasmania, winning on Delma at Spreyton.

Fortunately there was one lone place of enlightenment for the women prior to the first World War and that was Perth where the visionary James Brennan saw no impediment to issuing a licence in 1912 to a young Pearl O'Brien so she could compete at city meetings.

A version of the life and times of Pearl O'Brien, later to become Pearl Kelly, was printed 31 years ago but the inaccuracies contained within were so numerous as to render it the most inaccurate piece of journalism I have stumbled across. The saving grace is that at least she was remembered.

Due to Pearl's importance in the overall history of women in Harness Racing being so telling, her life story deserves being re-visited and researched properly.

Pearl was born at Koo-Wee-Rup in Gippsland (Victoria) in March 1894, the third child of labourer John William (sometimes known as William John) and Rushworth-born Sarah Annie O'Brien (daughter of pig farmer Christopher Davidson). Sarah was married when just fifteen and in 1904 moved to Western Australia with her husband and three children. The O'Brien clan was to increase in number by two in Perth with the birth of the boys Christopher in 1907 and John David in 1912.

Having initially grown up in the country, young Pearl developed an interest in horses at an early age and this interest was always encouraged by her parents John and Sarah.

Competing at shows in ladies hack and pony events stirred the competitive juices in Pearl and it was soon evident that she possessed above average riding skills that were sufficient to be tested in the professional sphere of trotting races.

Boxing was one of the major sporting attractions in the formative years of Australia and whenever locals challenged and defeated pugilists from overseas it was headline news.



Charles James Kelly (alias Dick Cullen - champion boxer)

One of the most gregarious visitors to Perth was San Francisco born Charles James Kelly who competed in the boxing ring as Dick Cullen and was quite an adept exponent of the sweet science winning 32 of his 65 bouts and drawing 14 of them.

An orthodox lightweight Dick Cullen became the Lightweight Champion of the Pacific Coast in California and came to Perth in 1904 as a 24-year-old and after fighting in Perth, and Sydney for sixteen months returned to America.

On the 29th December 1909 the Sydney Morning Herald announced that Dick Cullen had arrived back in Australia and intended to settle permanently in Perth.

Cullen was always in the news, a larger than life figure who fought the likes of "Snowy" Corbett, "Black Paddy", Frank Thorn and "Zulu" becoming the Lightweight champion of W.A., but missing out on the Australian lightweight title when he was beaten on points after a hard fought 20 rounds with Frank Thorn in Sydney on February 1910.

He then was beaten by Bob Whitelaw before thrashing Rudolph Unholz and was slated to meet South African Arthur Douglas but that fight was scuppered and replaced with another one in Melbourne.

On 25th July 1910 Dick met the world renowned pugilist Hughie Mehegan at the famous Cyclorama on the corner of Fitzroy Street and Victoria Parade in East Melbourne and was outclassed going to the canvas five times in round four before a policeman, Inspector Costello, stopped the fight.

He also defeated ex-amateur featherweight champion of Australia Jack Read in Sydney in 1911 but Cullen was not just a boxer because he also refereed, promoted boxing matches and once was involved in a match versus wrestler Rudolph Kohl over three 20 minute rounds at Shaftesbury Gardens in Perth.

Cullen took over the management in 1912 of the King's Palace in Market Street, a venue where he promoted all manner of sporting contests as



indeed he did at His Majestys Theatre and Shaftesbury Gardens, also arranging and promoting sporting carnivals in Perth for runners and walkers, some at the W.A.C.A and some at the Claremont Showgrounds.

The Royal Perth Show was a magnet for anyone interested in agriculture and horses so it was inevitable that the paths of Pearl O'Brien and Dick Cullen would cross and in what could only be described as a whirlwind romance, the pair become engaged in January 1913 only a couple of days after Pearl rode a pony called Jumbo into sixth place in the Tradesman's Handicap on New Year's eve, becoming the first female ever to compete against the men in a trotting race on a metropolitan track.

Pearl and Dick were engaged the following week and as an engagement gift Dick purchased Jumbo so his wife-to-be would have a horse to compete with.

Pearl almost won her first race on January 14th 1913 on Jumbo but was passed near the line by Nipper Brown and received "well merited applause" for her efforts by the crowd.

Two months later Jumbo came off second best with a train at a railway crossing – as one does – and was killed.

That same month Dick, like thousands of boxers before and since, got itchy fists to once again box professionally and signed an agreement to fight the newly crowned W.A. lightweight champion Alf Morey for the fifth time – the record was two draws and one win apiece between the pair - despite having been out of the ring for nine months.

The absence from the ring may have affected the ringcraft of Dick but not his courage. Having faring well early in the bout, Dick suffered some fearful blows in the eleventh and twelfth rounds, so much so he was virtually out on his feet.

Any sane man would have thrown in the towel, however, Dick as the promoter wanted the fans to get full value and came out foolishly for the thirteenth round. A barrage of blows from Morey had Cullen almost blind from bulging contusion to his face and free flowing blood as he was rendered almost senseless.

Staggering backwards towards the ropes, Dick was saved from an absolute knockout by referee Paddy Basto who called enough just as – in a deja vu moment - a police officer came bursting through the ropes bent on stopping the pitiful beating himself.

The papers of the day reported that the "braved display by the Yankee Cullen made hundreds of friends though his game display" and forecast that he "should now stick to fight promoting for which he appears to be specially adapted, as he has all the business instincts of a typical Yankee."

A fortnight later Dick Cullen married Pearl in a private wedding ceremony, no doubt due to his somewhat damaged physical appearance, and as a wedding gift to Pearl purchased the very promising pony Nell Gwynne which had been imported to the West from Victoria by James Brennan.

Nell Gwynne became part of Australian Harness Racing history on 12th July at the W.A.C.A. when Pearl rode her to victory, the first win by a female against the men at any metropolitan track in Australia. She won again on the mare on Monday 22nd September when papers of the day reported, "the little mare was ridden a fine race by Mrs Kelly and when being led past the judge by the clerk of the course she was given a hearty cheer."

Just the Saturday night before Pearl's husband Dick once again returned to the ring and defeated "Snowy" Corbett on points in a bruising twenty round bout at His Majesty's theatre.

Pearl had to share the limelight with another woman in the second half of 1913 when Mrs Maggie Burgess won a string of races with Wally M, who was an infinitely better pacer than Nell Gwynne.

In January 1914 Pearl travelled to Sydney with her husband and applied to the NSW Trotting Association for a rider/driver licence but it was knocked back even though at that time she had won four races with Nell Gwynne, two in Perth and two in unregistered races.

## US THOUGHTS ON WOMEN DRIVERS IN 1918

I cannot refrain from giving my views of the situation which were formed after seeing one of the most prominent woman drivers in the central States drive in a number of races.

Mrs Chas. H Deyo takes the position that as women are at the present called upon to perform labor, they should be allowed to drive in professional races against the men.

I think if trainers are so situated that their wives can accompany the stable on a campaign and act as bookkeeper, that is a very fine arrangement. Their work does not bring them into unpleasant situations, and they find it both healthful and interesting.

They are splendid women, informed on all subjects, and are no horse bugs saturated with horse knowledge and conversation alone, but are better equipped in the finer things of the world than many ladies who have never been inside of a training stable.

But to see a woman get up and drive in a race in a big field of hopped pacers, or trotters for that matter – probably the danger is no greater in one place than it is in the other – makes a real lady look entirely out of place to me.

To see her beating and banging and old pacer through the stretch makes me think that the mothers of old are gone forever. I am thankful that I have never seen a bad accident in a field where there was a woman driver competing, but after seeing a good many spills, with half the field down, and half the drivers bruised up terribly, I have always felt very thankful that there were no ladies in the wreck.

I see no objection, and, in fact, would enjoy much seeing a special event against time with a lady driver taking the leading role, particularly if she be a capable reinswoman, and there are many of them, with only two horses on the track, the principal and the prompter; but in a big field of horses, where men get excited and say and do things they would not think of doing in the presence of a lady, it makes an entirely different situation.

I felt certain that the "powers to be" would pass a rule, or amend one of the old ones, during the past winter of rule tinkering, that would prevent women drivers taking part in regular races, but it seems to have been neglected – May 1918.

Walter Moore – renowned writer for the Horse Review

Pearl also harboured an ambition to ride in galloping events and made an application to ride at the Kalgoorlie races that year but it was refused, in true chauvinistic manner, because galloping authorities thought that her skirts may frighten the horses (Pearl wore the normal silk jacket and rode in a divided skirt).

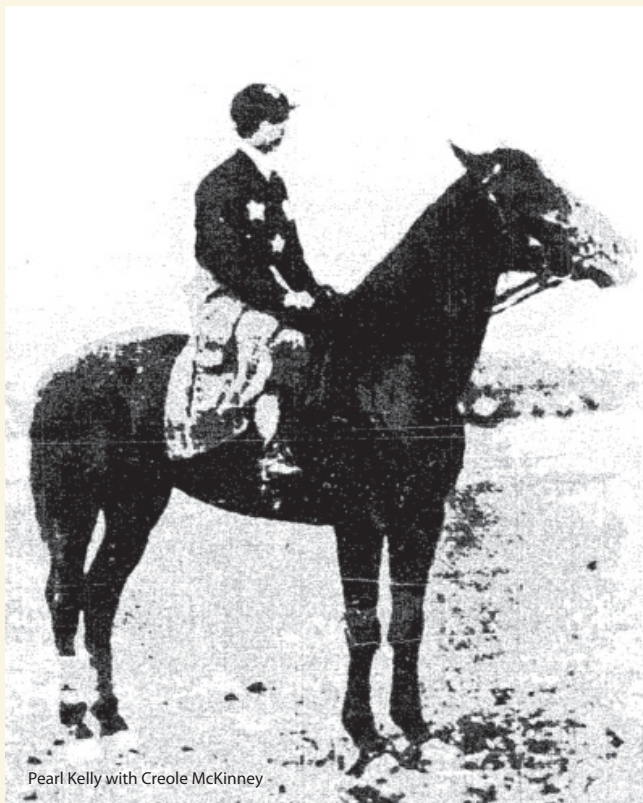
It was always difficult for Pearl to convince other owners to engage her to ride their horses other than her own and William Blight was one of those. However, after a private trial at which Pearl got his pacer Queen to go some four seconds faster than it had ever gone before, Blight hired her.

She rode Queen into third place at the W.A.C.A. and won with her at unregistered meetings, so William engaged her for his other horse Snowfoot. On Anzac Day 1914 Pearl repaid that confidence by winning with Snowfoot and then won again on it the following week.

While punters may have accorded Pearl a warm reception whenever she won, her mounts were always at odds because Pearl was a devout non-bettor and on 23rd May 1914 she achieved another first – a double – winning on Snowfoot and Nell Gwynne with the press reporting that both horses, "were practically unbacked and the bookmakers must have had a good win over their success."

That was the last Perth winner for Pearl and on July 2nd the following year husband Dick yet again put on the gloves yet again to earn a quid,





Pearl Kelly with Creole McKinney

fighting the visiting Frenchman Marcel Denis over 20 rounds under the Marquis of Queensbury rules at His Majesty's Theatre. Marcel knocked Dick down in the second round with a right hook to the jaw and a halt was called to the fight in the fifth round.

With no more money to be made fighting and with no horses to ride Pearl and her husband moved to Melbourne in 1916 as there was a prospect for some rich stake money events which the trotting fraternity had been promised by an enterprising John Wren, the races to be conducted at his Melbourne suburban circuit at Richmond.

With sixteen victories (six of those at the W.A.C.A.) in Western Australia on her C.V., Pearl was granted a licence by Victorian officials to ride despite her being a woman. Her first race at Richmond on May 8th 1916 attracted nationwide news with reports appearing not only in the Melbourne papers but also in the West Australia, Adelaide Advertiser, Hobart Mercury, Sydney Sportsman and Brisbane Courier.

The headlines in the Adelaide Advertiser read "A Woman Jockey Appearance in Victoria" and the accompanying report read as follows, "A feature of the Melbourne Trotting Club's meeting at Richmond to-day was the appearance of Mrs. Kelly, a young Western Australian horsewoman, in the saddle. Mrs. Kelly rode Snowfoot, a mare from Western Australia, in the Burnley Handicap, and she was greeted with applause as she rode the mare on to the running track. Snowfoot was not fancied to any extent, odds of 20 to 1 being obtainable about her. The mare broke after going about half a mile and spoiled whatever chance she had of winning. Mrs. Kelly handled her mount skillfully and proved herself an excellent horsewoman."

The Hobart Mercury went into more detail reporting, "Visitors at the trotting meeting in Richmond (Vic.) on Monday took a keen interest in the appearance of a lady Mrs. Kelly, from West Australia - competing as a rider in one of the trotting handicaps. Mrs. Kelly, who is of slight build, wore a cerise silk tunic. An exchange says she cut a striking figure as she moved around the track, on her husband's saddle winner Snowfoot. Her riding breeches were almost hidden under a divided skirt of blue cloth. She has a good seat in the saddle, and when Snowfoot "broke" during the contest she deftly pulled the mare into her stride again. Snowfoot was not fancied

in the betting on the race, in which there were no fewer than 20 starters. She finished about eighth."

In November that same year, Pearl's husband Charles James Kelly (alias Dick Cullen) was disqualified for life for ringing in Snowfoot as Todd and immediately enlisted for army service, travelling to France.

Following her husband's departure for the European front Mrs Kelly took control of his horses, training them at Fitzroy and success was almost immediate with her first ever Victorian win on New Years Day 1917 at Drouin with Creole McKinney, a trotter that belonged to her cousin.

With a growing belief that there was a viable future ahead of her in Victoria, Pearl traveled to Perth and convinced her parents to return to live in Victoria, however, on her return the opportunities and winners dried up due to the curtailment of dates and stake reductions due to the First World War.

Pearl eventually became the first woman ever to win a race against the men in Melbourne in the first month on the new season winning with 30/1 rank outsider Creole McKinney in the Richmond Hundred on 27th August 1917.

The price was not only a reflection of the trotter's form but also of the fact that Pearl Kelly had maintained her non-interest in betting and the amount invested by her cousin was just £2. In an interview after the race Pearl said, "I love horses and nothing gives me greater pleasure than to be in the saddle. Ever since I was a child I have been able to ride and have ridden gallopers in private and over fences at Shows. It is the only thing that cheers me up while my husband is away fighting.

Since he enlisted I have been anxious to win a race and cable the news to him ever since he left. I was beginning to despair of winning."

The official result for this historic win is as follows:-

#### **RICHMOND TROTTERS HUNDRED**

For unhoppled trotters only. Of 100 sovs, second 15 sovs, third 10 sovs, fourth, 5 sovs. One mile and a half

Mrs Kelly's bkm Creole McKinney, by Clarke McKinney-Creole, aged, 20 yds bhd (Mrs Kelly) 1

T Boyce's bg Harold lista, aged, 120 yds bhd (J James) 2

J Lancaster's bg Rostrevor, aged, 130 yds bhd (J Lancaster) 3

JB Zander's brm Lottie M aged, 100 yds bhd (R Loseby) 4

Other Starters: Murray Alto, Fitz Bells, Grant, Stam C, Mattie, scratch; Marvin Vale, Silver, 10 yds bhd; Shaver, Hurrv On, Anna Rose, King Osterley, 20 yds bhd; Flottie Huon, 50 yds bhd; Warrantucky, Pretty Polly, 70 yds bhd; Exford Maid, Ossi Cupitt, 80 yds bhd; Maud Direct, 90 yds bhd.

Betting - 9 to 4 against Silver, 4 to 1 agst Marvin Vale, 6 to 1 agst Lottie M, 7 to 1 agst Harold lista, 8 to 1 agst Anna Rose, 10 to 1 agst Florrie Huon, Exford Maid, 15 to 1 agst King Osterley, 30 to 1 agst Creole McKinney.

Won by 15 yards, Rostrevor 10 yards away third. Time: 3m 54 1/2 secs. A protest against the winner for having allegedly been ridden by a person who had competed at a registered meeting was dismissed.

The following month the pair combined to win the heat and final of the Royal Handicap Trot at the 1917 Melbourne Royal Show defeating G.H. Alford's Miss Shandon and T.R. Hardman's Welcome Chimes.

In 1918 Charles Kelly returned from active service and due to his service for his country he was given a dispensation for his life disqualification (after a plea from John Wren) and resumed training but his colours of cerise jacket, white star, green cap with white star were never sighted in the metropolitan area winner's circle. As a horse trainer he was a good boxer.

In fact his wife Pearl went completely winless at Richmond and the major country registered meetings in the 1918/19 and 1919/20 seasons with her only wins coming in the odd trotting race on galloping programmes or at shows and gymkhanas.

The latter season was notable for the arrival in Victoria of a Queenslander called Percy Shipp (alias George Young) who made a name from himself by winning six races and finishing third on the Victorian Reinsmen's list as well as winning the 1920 Brisbane Thousand with Harold Wilkes.





May Webster with La Reval

The 1920/21 season was far kinder to Pearl as she won three races thanks to a newcomer in the stable, the pacer Direct Style who won at Ballarat in January 1921 and Earl Doble who won at Geelong in May but it would be more than a year before Pearl won an event in the city.

In June 1922 there was a significant happening over in South Australia at a meeting of the Adelaide Trotting Club at Thebarton Oval when no less than 24 women riders competed in a saddle trot (tote operation was refused) that required two heats and a final. For anyone with a passing knowledge of the great trotting families of South Australia, it would be no surprise to learn that the winner was ridden by Miss May Webster who was present with a gold wristlet watch valued at £10. The complete list of competitors in the first ever women's trotting race were:-

#### FIRST HEAT

1. Speedonia (MISS A DAENKE)
2. Dorrie Direct (MISS M CAMPBELL)
3. Black Prince (MISS G BIRCHMORE)

Others: Brown Molly (MISS E JOHNSON), Gay Lad (MISS M SMITH), Lady Blue (MISS E EICKE), Sir Snowy (Mrs CROWTHER), Tiny Ribbons (MISS McLACHLAN), Chelsea Lass (MRS MM CAMERON), Little Thora (MISS E WEBSTER), Dixie Cleve (MISS A MARTIN), Ginger (MISS GEERKINS). Margins: 10yds X 30yds. Time: 2:56.6

#### SECOND HEAT

1. Traveller (MISS S McBRIDE)
2. La Reval (MISS MAY WEBSTER)
3. Huon Red (MRS J HENRY)

Others: Scotch Heather (MRS HJ MATHIAS), Sir Bosco (MISS C GRIVELL), Steel Bells (MRS V BATTEN), Emily P (MISS E GLEESON), Stanbonwood (MISS M GIBBETT), Mystery Boy (MISS G JOHNS), My Hope

(MISS K CLANCY), Sportsman (MISS A DAVIES). Margins: 10yds X 10yds. Time: 2:55.6

#### FINAL

1. La Reval (MISS MAY WEBSTER)
2. Speedonia (MISS E DAENKE)
3. Dorrie Direct (MISS M CAMPBELL)
4. Traveller (MISS S McBRIDE)

Margins: Neck X 5yds. Time: 2:50.2

The Adelaide Advertiser reported, "The idea introduced by the Adelaide Trotting Club of setting apart an event for female riders proved a great success at Jubilee Oval on Saturday evening. The girls and women had been given a trial at the grounds on Wednesday and by their display the stewards decided that they had shown ability and were competent to start in the event."

The following month, on 24th July 1922 at the last Melbourne meeting of the 1921/22 season, Pearl finally won an event, being victorious on the pacer Lady Ville with the papers reporting, "A woman rider, Mrs. Pearl Kelly, steered Lady Ville to victory in the First Division of the Novice Handicap at Richmond on Monday. Her mount started favourite, and beat a field of 16 horses. Mrs. Kelly has been riding in trotting races in Victoria for some considerable time."

The 1922/23 season was arguably Pearl's most successful with four Richmond winners which placed her third on the metropolitan list which may seem remarkable to those reading this article but it must be remembered that Richmond only hosted less than ten meetings a season.

Pearl was placed with Lady Ville at the first meeting of the new season and then took part in her seventh successive Royal Show.

The highlights of that Show were the mile records set first by the champion trotter Grand Voyage (competing then as Bonnie Voyage) and then beaten by Percy Shipp's star pacer Harold Wilkes.



During the 1922 Show programme of ring events Shipp engaged Pearl Kelly for the first time to ride one of his horses. Pearl was engaged for the trotter Molly Harum in the Royal Handicap Trot, a race Pearl had won back in 1917 with Creole McKinney and she and the Queensland-bred mare duly saluted in both the heat and Final.

Over in South Australia the newspapers were all over a crash in a ladies exhibition saddle trot at Thebarton on 25th November when the leader Belle Wilkes, ridden by Miss G. Birchmore, skipped for a stride and virtually tripped in its hopples bringing down the two horses following, namely Huon Red (Ivy Coombe) and Miss Bosco (E. Webster). Unfortunately Ivy Coombe suffered a broken collarbone.

Pearl Kelly and Lady Ville were successful again in January 1923 and the Argus was full of praise for Pearl's skill and judgement – "Much enthusiasm was aroused over Mrs Pearl Kelly's win on Lady Ville in the second division of the Association Handicap. For many years Mrs Kelly has been identified with the light harness sport, both in Victoria and Western Australia. She exhibited considerable skill in the saddle on Monday and from the start the issue was never in doubt. Just when it appeared that her mount might be blocked she got through cleverly, and, taking the lead, maintained it to the end." Percy Shipp won a double on the same programme.

Pearl picked up placing at Colac on Wynall in February and had two second place finishes at Richmond on April 2nd on Lady Ville and Molly Harum.

On 21st May 1923 Pearl won her first Metropolitan win for Percy Shipp with Molly Harum and then created history the following month (25th June) by posting the first double by a woman in Melbourne winning on Molly Harum and Queenie Dixie.

That double made national headlines with the Hobart Mercury reporting, "Mrs Pearl Kelly, who has ridden three winners at recent Melbourne meetings, is the only woman jockey in Eastern Australian trotting races. She would not be able to compete in Sydney (says 'The Sydney Sportsman') because riding and driving licenses are not issued to women. Mrs Kelly's knowledge of the Richmond track Melbourne enables her to adapt herself to the prevailing conditions. At a recent meeting the track was rather soft and she kept her mounts well out from the rail and scored first with Queenie Dixie and later with Molly Harum in the Trotters Handicap over two miles. In West Australia and in the country towns of New South Wales there are events for women riders and drivers. Mrs Kelly has a style that is more elegant than that of any of her male rivals. Leaning well forward she sits almost motionless and exerts a light though firm control of the reins."

At the last Richmond meeting for the 1922/23 season Pearl competed in her first ever Group One race, the inaugural running of the Victoria Trotters Cup, and came within a length of becoming the first woman to win a Group One race (it took another 62 years before Anne Frawley won the Australian Derby with Vanderport before it actually happened).

Pearl's shot run continued when six days into the new season Pearl partnered the Percy Shipp trained trotter Molly Harum to win and that was enough to convince Percy to allow her to drive his second stringer Cole King in the 1923 Group One Richmond Thousand, the richest race in Australia.

A driver with the Kelly surname won the feature but it was Greg, no relation, on Sam Huon with Pearl and Cole King finishing midfield in eighth place.

The winners dried up for Pearl thereafter and the calendar year of 1924 her world came crashing down when her husband Charles (alias Dick Cullen) returned to Western Australia.

Charles could not break into the close knit Victorian boxing community as a referee or as a promoter but he was much loved in Perth and was welcomed back as the West's premier referee. The West Australian said, "There are few erstwhile champions who speak with less modesty of their doings than Dick Cullen and his arrival back in West Australia is a boon for the sport."

Charles was appointed as a chief referee and resumed the management of several boxers and flirted with the idea of training youngsters. His

## HORSEWOMEN! SHOULD THEY BE GRANTED LICENSES?

By J.S. Walford (Australian Trotting Record)

There is a diversity of opinion among trotting men as to whether women should be granted riders and drivers' licenses. Personally, I am of the opinion that women riders opposed to professionals should be confined to racing pictures at the movies, where the racing crook who has backed his horse for a fortune, squares the rider of the good young man's horse, and after the jockeys have weighed out the colours are torn off the crook jockey and donned by the good young man's best girl, who without bothering about such trifles as a reference to the stewards or weighing out, rides the "old mare's foal" to victory, saves the ancestral acres, and the pair live happily ever afterwards.

Women riders have never been allowed on Sydney metropolitan tracks, but they have been allowed on the Richmond (NSW) course, which some forty miles from Sydney.

Some months back, at Richmond, Melisande driven by Horace Dunstan, and Chester, ridden by Mrs G. Moulds, accidentally, I'll allow, interfered so palpably with Dunstan's mount that had Melisande been beaten, a protest must have been upheld. After the race, I heard the remark made to Dunstan that had he been beaten, he would have got the race on protest. "On a protest!" he replied. "What sort of a man would I be to protest against a woman?"

This is just the trouble with women riding against professionals. A horse race with hundreds of pounds depending on the issue is not a race at a Sunday school picnic, and it is best and best so long as tactics are kept within the bounds of racing law, and the average man would not care to take advantage of a woman in a race, even if within his rights.

The N.S.W. Trotting Club has now passed a rule confining women's operations to races ridden or driven in by women only, which reads as follows:- "No lady shall be permitted to ride or drive in any trotting race unless the conditions of such race specially provide that all horses shall be ridden or driven by ladies." This rule might well have gone still further, and provided that women's races be confined to unhopped horses."

interest in the latter was sparked by some rudimentary work he had done before he left with Pearl's young 11 year-old brother John David, who was later to fight as Jack O'Brien.

The move interstate of her husband was compounded by the aftermath of a race at Richmond on 14th April when Pearl was disqualified for twelve months with Trixie Alto, the first horse she trained after Charles left.

The disqualification was reported thus:- "Mrs. Pearl Kelly, the only woman rider at trotting meetings, at Richmond to-day incurred the displeasure of the stipendiary stewards over the running of Trixie Alto in the Novice Handicap. Trixie Alto, ridden by Mrs. Kelly, failed to secure a place, and the stewards disqualified Mrs. Kelly, together with the mare and its owner, for twelve months for allegedly not trying to win."

The following month Edward Lawrence who was the promoter at Kedron Park (Queensland) wanted Pearl to go to Queensland as an attraction but she could not because her appeal against the disqualification had yet to be heard.

Pearl was not the only woman rider having trouble with authorities because in New South Wales, Constance Moulds, the mother of famous post WW2 Harold Park reinsman Lawrie Moulds, was being frustrated by male stewards.

The following report on the 24th June Menangle meetings provides some insight into what women had to put up with – "Mrs G Moulds weighed out to ride her husband's chestnut gelding Chester in the West & Southern Handicap, but the stewards declined to allow her to compete. It was officially stated that if there was interference in the race, the male



reinsmen would not feel disposed to lodge a complaint and the public had to be protected. The Club may put on a race for lady drivers in the future."

The following month the press reported that "Mrs G Moulds rode her husband's horse Chester splendidly in the Hawkesbury Handicap, a mile and a half, for unhoppled horses at Londonderry (Richmond, NSW), being third almost throughout to Bay Ribbon and Cherry Wood. Chester never made a false step." Soon after Constance was placed on another of her husband's horses, the mare Bay Loch at Richmond, but there were rumblings about the rebellious club and a couple of months later the State ruling body (NSW Trotting Club) announced that "ladies cannot now take part in races in New South Wales in which men compete, but Clubs can put on an event for lady riders."

Meanwhile the Melbourne season ended with the talented Jack James the leading driver with just seven wins and still Pearl's appeal had not been heard.

An amazing piece of history though was written at this time at the Jubilee Oval in Adelaide, albeit in an exhibition restricted to pacing and trotting ponies. The nine-year-old, yes nine-year-old, Madge Davies rode Tiny Ribbons to victory, defeating her older sister Gladys who was aboard Miss Priscilla.

Finally on October 1st, just over five months since the fateful race, Pearl Kelly had her disqualification revoked, although the owner Mr. E.C. Luckie and the horse Trixie Alto remained outed until the end on April 1925.

At her first ride back Pearl Kelly triumphed aboard Queen Dixie on 6th October 1924 with the press reporting, "Mrs. Kelly and the trotting mare Queen Dixie celebrated their return to the racecourse at Richmond yesterday by winning the first division of the Progressive Handicap in hollow style. Queen Dixie was so heavily supported that she started at 6 to 4 against in a large field."

Queen Dixie was placed at her next three Richmond starts for Pearl before eventually cracking it for a win at Woodend on 2nd December.

A fortnight later at Menangle that long promised ladies event was conducted and the promising mare Innisfail, ridden by Constance Moulds, defeated Almost Pick (Miss M Taber), Design Elmo (Miss Britton), Plain Val (Mrs Frost), Oakeen

(Miss Munro), Teddy Elmo (Miss E Norris) and Sisteena (Miss G Troy).

In the New Year another lady, Lillian Walsh, joined the ranks of lady riders in Victoria and competed at a Ballarat meeting at the Redan racecourse, colloquially known as "The Miners". Pearl emerged victorious on Elgin Chimes and later in the day she finished second on the same horse.

The calendar year of 1925 was a very significant year as rumblings about horses being ridden in saddle became a roar, so much so that horses in saddle were barred in WA in all races worth £200 or more, they were banned in the open Handicap and Flying events at all Richmond meetings and in Sydney all races had to be 100% sulkies or 100% ridden. There was also a suggestion that the weight of riders who rode in saddle be reduced from 11 stone 10 pounds to nine stone.

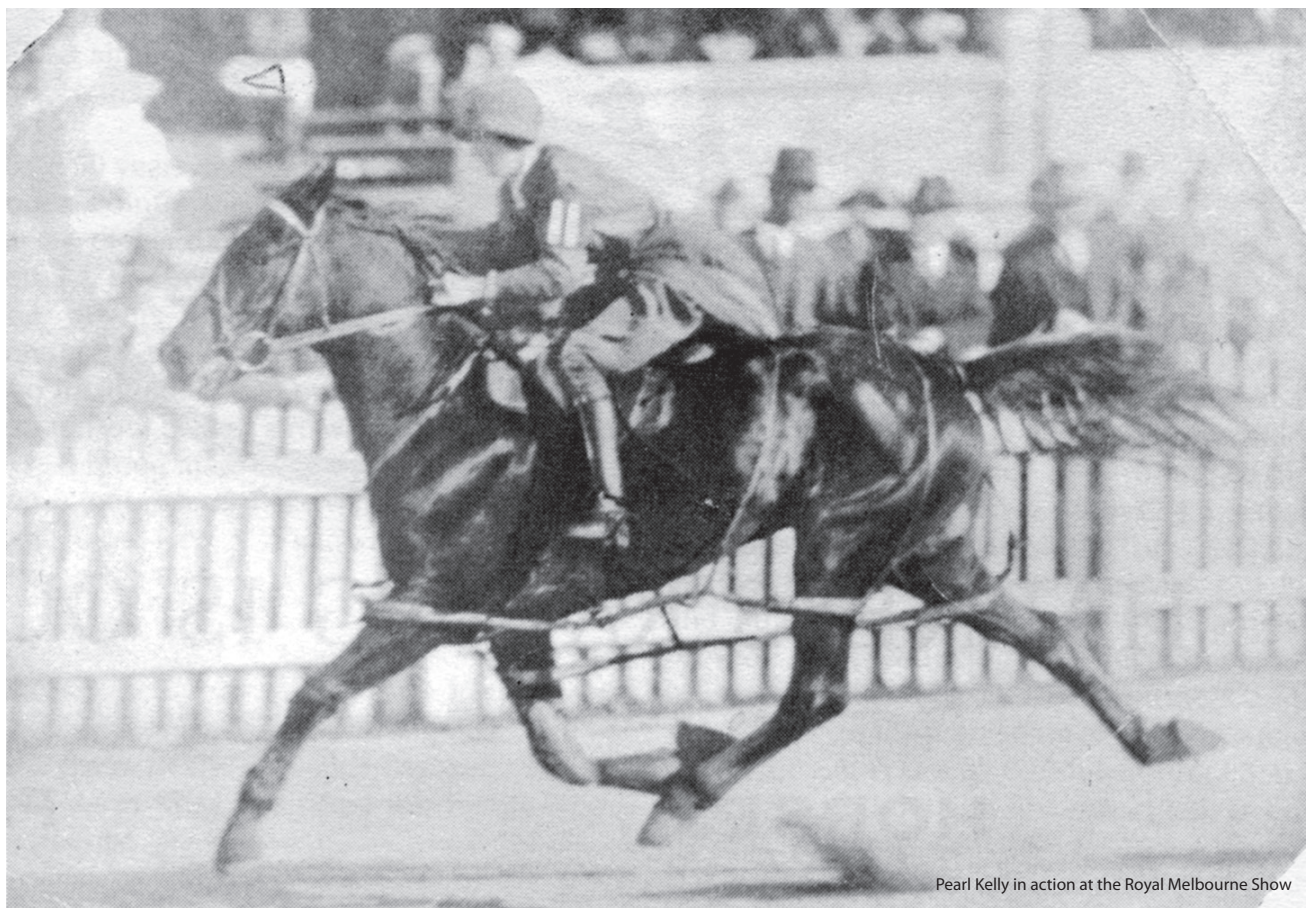
Women competing against the men continued to be controversial and a front page editorial (see separate box) in the Australian Trotting Record by their controversial and often pig-headed correspondent J.S. Walford shows the patronizing attitudes that existed back in those days.

The Shipp lost their star pacer Harold Wilkes in December 1925 with the champion being buried in a special plot enclosed by a fence at the Wee-Wee-Rup property of Mr Moriarty, a kind deed that Lily Shipp spoke gratefully of. Not only was he loss an a racetrack earner, so too was his stud career (he had two seasons while racing at a fee of 8 guineas).

Pearl always regretted that she never got to pair with the champion Harold Wilkes in a race, but the pacer never once went around in a race without Percy Shipp handling the reins.

With the growing instability with women riders in races and the very existence of saddle races Pearl could see the writing on the wall and opened up a hairdressing salon on the busy Sydney Road in Brunswick to supplement her income.

It wasn't long before the shop provided almost her entire income, with only minor monies at the Shows being acquired through riding and driving as there were no wins for Pearl for the remainder of the 1925/26 season at



Pearl Kelly in action at the Royal Melbourne Show





# BRUTAL MURDER OF WIFE AND THEN SUICIDE

## SHIPP TOLD MANY PEOPLE THAT HE WOULD KILL HIS WIFE

**Richmond Tragedy Sequel to Years of Bitterness and Brutality**  
**QUESTION OF OWNERSHIP OF TROTTERS**



**WHAT** morbid plan of murder had germinated in the brain of Percy Shipp when on Friday last he sought a reconciliation with the wife from whom he had been separated for months? On several occasions he had threatened to kill her. He was a crack pistol shot, and always had firearms in his possession. On Monday last he carried out his threat and shot his wife dead. WAS that offer of reconciliation made merely with the object of blinding her to his real intentions? It looks as though that were the case. She refused, so he tricked her, cornered her, and killed her.

THE murder of Lily Shipp by her husband, Percy Shipp, will be a sad chapter in the history of the city. It is a tragedy that has shocked the public and has caused many to wonder what the cause was. The couple had been living apart for three years, and the police stated that the childless couple had been living apart for three years and they had been called to the house on numerous occasions to stop fights between them. Neighbours have told the police that Shipp on a number of occasions acted cruelly towards his wife and once was prevented from pulling out her tongue. On another occasion Mrs. Shipp had her leg and arm broken. Mr. Shipp was heard to say that she had been kicked by a horse. Mrs. Shipp, however, told neighbours that Shipp was responsible.

At the inquest into the death of George Young (aged 42 years), horse trainer, of Kent Street, Richmond, and Lily Maude Veal (aged 49 years), housekeeper, of the same address, the Coroner found that Young murdered Veal, and then committed suicide. The couple were known as Mr. and Mrs. Shipp. Young was a divorced man, and his former wife and children lived at Cessnock (NSW) and Lily too was a divorcee, having married Albert Veal at Newcastle in 1905, living with him for two and half years before divorcing him in 1910 and moving in with George Young.

The papers of the day didn't miss a detail of the shocking tragedy reporting thus: "A series of domestic quarrels which have extended over a number of years culminated yesterday when a well known owner and driver of trotting horses murdered his wife in a house in 145 Kent Street Richmond and then walked across the street to a dairy where he committed suicide.

About six months ago the victims quarreled and separated. Mrs Shipp obtained a position in a private hospital and her husband continued to live in the house. She visited the house several times but always selected a day on which a trotting meeting was being held.



**LEAVING HER HUSBAND** after a period of brutal treatment that he would have put up with, Mrs. Lily Shipp, well-known trotting enthusiast and racehorse owner, admitted a proposal for reconciliation, and was murdered three days later.

On the 30th June, 1930, the trotting fraternity and indeed the Melbourne public were shocked when Percy Shipp shot his wife Lily, and then committed suicide. The police stated that the childless couple had been living apart for three years and they had been called to the house on numerous occasions to stop fights between them. Neighbours have told the police that Shipp on a number of occasions acted cruelly towards his wife and once was prevented from pulling out her tongue. On another occasion Mrs. Shipp had her leg and arm broken. Mr. Shipp was heard to say that she had been kicked by a horse. Mrs. Shipp, however, told neighbours that Shipp was responsible.

## CONQUEST FACES BIGAMY CHARGE

**Remarkable Dash From London For Sake of a Girl**

### AND SHE WANTS HIM BACK

LOVE of a girl was everything to Norman Alexander Conquest, the remarkable young man whose amazing career in Australia and abroad was told in "Truth" recently. It seemed that he made a dramatic dash from London to Melbourne to be with her, but it also led him into other strange, but relatively minor, of this last.

EXCLUSIVELY for the first time all our own side, however, when Conquest came to Melbourne last week, charged with having kidnapped a London girl, the second wife, he had her arrested at once back to his own to make him happy.

Norman Conquest, a young man who has made a name for himself in the world of the stage, is now in Melbourne, where he is being held in custody. He is charged with kidnapping a London girl, the second wife, and is being held in custody. He is being held in custody.

**Made No Claim**

He went into hospital in September, 1927, and was released in January, 1928, and he was seen again until today. He is now in Melbourne, where he is being held in custody. He is being held in custody.

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## PATSY'S NAME WAS HER DOWNFALL

**GIRL GAOLED FOR SHOPLIFTING**

**A STOLEN ROMANCE**

Patricia, who was named for her mother, was the daughter of a well-known Melbourne family. She was a beautiful girl, and was very popular. She was a well-known Melbourne family.

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## THE SHOCK MURDERS SUICIDE INVOLVING PERCY SHIPP AND HIS WIFE LILY IN SUBURBAN RICHMOND WAS HEADLINE NEWS IN THE MELBOURNE "TRUTH" NEWSPAPER IN 1930

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About six months ago the victims quarreled and separated. Mrs Shipp obtained a position in a private hospital and her husband continued to live in the house. She visited the house several times but always selected a day on which a trotting meeting was being held.

Knowing that her husband was to drive Lulu Lady at the Richmond trotting meeting yesterday (June 30), Mrs Shipp visited the house with the intention of obtaining some of her clothes. Some time later Shipp harnessed a trotter into a jinker and drove away and as soon as he had gone his wife entered the house. Percy Shipp, however, returned home in a motor car shortly before 11 o'clock. Leaving the motor car in a narrow street at the rear of the house he went down a lane and entered the back gate. Several minutes later neighbours heard four shots fired in rapid succession and saw Percy Shipp walk through the front door into the street in a very agitated manner.

Immediately the shots were fired Mrs Taylor, a neighbour telephoned to the Richmond police. Meanwhile Shipp walked across the street to a dairy at the corner of Gardner and Kent streets owned by Mr Joseph Jones. After walking into the kitchen and saying he wanted some gear, Shipp went down the yard towards a stable. Several fierce dogs attacked him, but he broke free and entered the building where he shot himself in the head. Constable Crawford found Mrs Shipply dead with four bullet wounds in her back. A bedroom was in disorder. Drawers had been pulled out and the contents spread over the floor including a letter, addressed to Shipp, from the Victorian Trotting Association that requested him to attend an inquiry to investigate a complaint by his wife.

It is believed that the victims had frequently quarreled and that of recent time a certain amount of dissension had arisen though her action of scratching trotting horses from races at the last moment. These horses were owned by her and trained by her husband but she had asked the VTA to order that the horses be removed from his stables which they had done so.

The supporters of Percy told reporters that Lily was a neat freak and an incessant nagger. The house at 145 Kent Street was called "Harold Wilkes" after a horse of that name which was owned by the Shipp.

registered meetings.

A further nail in the coffin for opportunities for women was hammered in the aftermath of a race at Richmond (Victoria) on 10th May 1926.

The Argus reported, "Dagmar Style led for the first mile of the two mile event but then began to tire visibly and drifted back through the field. The Percy Shipp trained Sprightly (ridden by Miss Jacobs) crashed into the sulky of Dagmar Style and Miss Jacobs was thrown against the inner rail and sustaining bruising and shock. Stewards held an inquiry and ordered that no women – Mrs Kelly excepted – shall be permitted to ride or drive a horse in any race, but for unhoppled horses."

An editorial in the Australian Trotting Record, suggested the stewards did not go far enough stating, "The Club would perhaps be better advised if it decided to debar altogether women from competing against men, for reinsmen must naturally feel a certain uneasiness and restraint in opposing women, while the latter would be spared the discomfiture of the indignity of which befell Miss Jacobs on Monday."

Economically things got worse as Australia, and indeed the world, spiraled towards Depression, stake money declined dramatically and Pearl found that with no horses in her stable, outside riding/driving opportunities were as scarce as hen's teeth.

Everyone was under pressure and many marriages suffered under the financial strain and the Shipp's, who had provided Pearl with so many opportunities were one such example that would have a tragic ending (see page opposite).

It was a real struggle and in fact the next time Pearl figured in the placings was at Nar Nar Goon on 30th May 1927 when she was twice runner-up on Allestelle on a day that became famous for the first triple dead-heat in Victoria between Landburn (T. Kendall), Millritius (Will Whitburn) and Aladdin Voyage (M. O'Keefe).

The one moment of solace and joy for Pearl and other women was the annual Royal Agricultural Show where horse events for them were always in abundance including trotting races, jumping events, hack and pony races, the spectacular water long jumps, hunter and flag events.

At the 1927 Royal Show there was a tragedy involving the Sale 26-year-old Dolly Jacobs who was thrown when her horse fell in the first heat of the Women's Handicap Trot at the Royal Show and died while being taken to the Melbourne Hospital.

The accident occurred when Miss Jacobs was passing Mr. John Phyl and's Delma Huon, ridden by Mrs. Pearl Kelly, who won the first heat on the Percy Shipp trained Cole King. Miss Jacobs rolled clear of the horse, and lay still. She was suffering from serious head injuries and lived only about 15 minutes after the accident.

Lily Shipp fancied herself as a driver and actually won the tragedy marred heat with David Direct. In the final Pearl elected to be paired with Cole King and duly defeated Lily who drove David Direct. Subsequent to that day, Pearl was never again engaged for any of the Shipp stable runners.

Winless in 1928, Pearl maintained her interest in the horses riding at as many shows as possible and was joined in the professional ranks by one of Australia's most famous equestriennes in Alice Laidlaw, whose biography, compiled by Ken Dyer, appears elsewhere in this issue of Harness Racing International.

Officials were not keen to add to the ranks of women riders/drivers but the international reputation of Alice made it impossible for them to refuse her application.

Alice won two heats at the 1928 Royal Melbourne Show and another woman Verna O'Day won the women's race leaving Pearl winless.

Alice Laidlaw was fortunate at this time to be associated with a very smart country performer, something that Pearl could never claim to have had. Alice's star was Basil Bells who won several Flying Handicaps in the Western District in 1928 and 1929.

Still on the odd occasion when Pearl managed to compete at a registered meeting it was news in both the Australian Trotting Record and the daily

newspapers, one such occasion being at Ballarat in late 1929 when both Pearl and Alice Laidlaw competed, with the Australian Trotting Record making special note of Pearl's lack of racing opportunities and luck over the past two years.

While Pearl's career was at its lowest ebb – in registered races at least as women from 1929 onwards were now banned from the city – as 1930 came around things were looking up for her husband Dick who received a most welcome boost in income and prestige when his application for a boxing instructor vacancy at Perth Boys School and the Guildford Grammar School in Western Australia was accepted.

Another O'Brien, Pearl's brother John, however, had a future national sporting career in the boxing arena that was in its embryonic stages.

John was growing up quickly, already insisting that everyone call him Jack as well informing them that he was going to be an even better boxer than his Yankee uncle Dick. Mind you, so did Dick.

With all the basics taught to him by Dick before he went to Perth, Jack was spotted by one of Dick's old adversaries Arthur Edwin Reeves (alias Snowy Corbett) while trying out.

Snowy continued to take a close interest in Jack's progress hinting on several occasions that would gladly manage his career, eventually signing him to a contract in August 1931.

In his first four fights for Corbett Jack earned just over three pounds in total and his father fronted Corbett and complained about where his son's career was heading. A heated argument then ensued with Corbett storming out saying, "Anyway he is not as good as you think he is. I wash my hands of the whole thing." Foolishly the contract was not torn up.

When Dick Cullen heard about what happened he invited Jack to come to Perth where he would train and manage him, an offer that Jack consented to after visiting Perth in March 1932.

On his return to Melbourne to prepare himself for life as a professional boxer Jack met up with a few mates for a farewell that saw him end up in court. Jack and his two mates stole a car for a joyriding session that lasted four hours and ended up costing each of the trio, a fine of £10.

Jack's career took off under Dick Cullen and in 1933 he became the welterweight champion of WA, won the middleweight championship of Victoria and defeated a string of opponents including Lee Paige (USA), Barney Keiswetter (South Africa) and Harry Vaughan (UK) from venues from Melbourne to Townsville.

Jack was subsequently hit with a breach of contract law suit from Snowy Corbett who was obviously seething at Jack's success. After a court hearing in 1934 at which Pearl Kelly appeared as a witness for her brother, the judge ruled in favour of Jack and his father William.

Two years earlier Pearl herself had to front the stewards when she was disqualified for twelve months, along with the owner and driver, over the running of Nellie Mauritius, a horse she was training. Given the rare opportunities that Pearl had now in registered races, it surprised no-one when on appeal one week later, her disqualification was repealed, but not that of the owner and driver.

The training of Nellie Mauritius was subsequently taken over by the new rising star of Victorian trotting, the youthful George Gath whose team of horses had him as the leading trainer/driver in Melbourne as well as Statewide.

Pearl didn't mind that as she was living in Port Melbourne near George's stables and Pearl struck up a friendship with the Gath clan, a friendship that was to last almost fifty years. Port Melbourne was also the site of an American style straight Speedway which was utilized on weekends for street racing.

By now the end of the road for women competing in registered races was all but over and up in New South Wales, the controlling body went further and took the rather remarkable step of introducing a rule that no nominations of a horse owned by a woman would be accepted.

Even at the Royal Melbourne Show there were no longer prize money races





for the women and that trend was also filtering through to the many country shows. It was a matter of competing for ribbons in ladies saddle races, high jump contests and hack contests for the women.

Only at the Sydney Royal Easter Show and the Adelaide Show (September), the expansive Queensland Show circuit and in country WA and SA were there opportunities for the women to compete against themselves with trotters and pacers.

Pearl's fame remained unblemished and when the first ever metropolitan women's race – with betting – was held at the tiny 550 yard Wayville circuit on 16th March 1935, Pearl was the first lady invited.

Twelve women competed in the historic event, including the two sisters, May and Doreen, from the famous Webster dynasty, with the race was won Miss Joan Nolan.

The official result for this historic event that received excited acceptance by fans on course and the betting public showed no objection either to the race investing 536 pounds on the race. Bookmakers came to the party and donated 20 pounds that was shared by the placed riders – 15 pounds, 3 pounds, 2 pounds.

The headlines in the paper the next day read "Good Display In Ladies Race – Nothing To Learn From Male Drivers" and the report of the race said, "In the Ladies Race competitors showed that mere man is not the only one who knows how to handle a horse in a race. The exhibition given in the event was very creditable. Miss Joan Nolan, who rode Erica Derby, always had her mount going well in the lead. She possesses good hands, perfect poise in the saddle, and kept the chestnut mare well together. She has been associated with horses, both in trotting and racing, since she was old enough to toddle, and is quite at home in jumping events. Others whose riding in this event elicited specially favourable comment were Mrs Verna O'Day and Mrs Pearl Kelly". For posterity the official record of this historic event was as follows:-

#### LADIES RACE of 40 pounds – 10f (2:35)

WJ Messenger's chma Erica Derby (Derby Lad – St Elmo m) 30yds (MISS JOAN NOLAN) 1; Mrs VL O'Day's bm Naivete 55yds (VERNA O'DAY) 2; A & W Dring's brg Al Galindo (PEARL KELLY) 3.

Others: Cracker Derby (MRS ALLEN), Lu Adon (MAY WEBSTER), Ribbonwood Hanks (DOREEN WEBSTER), Goulburn Boy (MISS STREETER), Cullmarsh (MISS DOYLE), Wild Bells (MRS HENRY), Derby Blend (MRS H CAMERON), Hapwood (MRS NOY), Brian Derby (MISS R RYAN) and Me Kardo (MISS BIRCHMORE). Time 3:05.6

An interesting sidelight to the event was some good natured barbs flying between various sections of the Press over the use of the words Ladies and Womens that went like this –

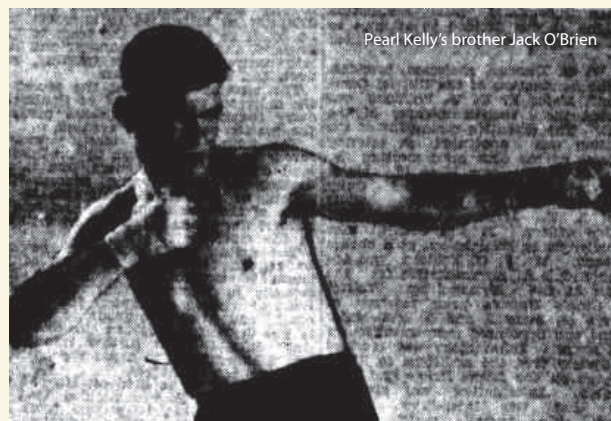
"In a section of the press snobbery was evident in reference to this event by the invidious distinction in the terms "women's" and "ladies". Had it been a tennis or hockey event, it would, of course, have been a ladies item. Our elite contemporaries must need refer to this particular race as one for women. How cultured Adelaide is becoming! As if a woman who rides or trains a horse is not as much a lady as the bread-and-butter miss who in less presentable attire swings a tennis racquet!

Pearl kept in contact with the sporting career of her brother Jack and when he came to Melbourne in 1937 she made sure that they met up again. Jack's career was on a downward plane at this stage and he was scheduled to fight Jim Starr in what was to all accounts a routine twelve round bout, however, it proved anything but as an excerpt from the Argus shows:-

"A boxer attacked the referee during a contest at Fitzroy Stadium last night, and when the bout was stopped in the third round a glass tumbler was thrown into the ring.

Jim Starr (12.0) was opposed to Jack O'Brien (11.12), a former middleweight champion of Victoria, in a 10-rounds bout

In the second round O'Brien was subjected to crushing punishment, his face being bruised and bleeding from rips, uppercuts, and swings. In



Pearl Kelly's brother Jack O'Brien

the heat of the melee one or two questionable blows smashed into his groin.

Amid the uproar of the towel from O'Brien's corner was thrown into the ring, but was not noticed by the referee, who was administering the count on O'Brien as he hung semi-conscious over the middle rope.

O'Brien staggered to his feet at the count of six, and a few seconds later the gong sounded to end the round. The sound of the bell was drowned by the noise, and O'Brien, fighting furiously, threw several punches at Starr, who tried to protect himself.

Both Starr and the referee (Merv Williams – later to feature in TV Ringside on Channel 7 in the 1960s) knew that the round had ended, but when the referee tried to restrain O'Brien he was met with a fusillade of blows. Fortunately the referee, a former Australian champion, knew how to protect himself, and O'Brien's attack was not damaging."

Jack's life was spiraling out of control as he was seen in the courts again in 1940 (when charged with attacking and robbing a taxi driver). While initially found guilty, that decision was overturned on appeal and the conviction quashed.

Just as Jack's boxing career had ended so too was Pearl's time in the saddle in races. Pearl was now in her forties and while her enthusiasm for horses had not waned in the slightest, her eyesight had and as World War Two hostilities commenced, she knew that retirement was nigh and bowed out from active competition.

Change too was on the cards for Pearl's husband Charles (alias Dick Cullen) who in the 1940s moved to Brisbane where he quickly set himself up a boxing training academy and in 1953 revolutionised the world of boxing by inventing a pneumatic or "balloon" glove that virtually eliminated the incidence of cuts on the faces of boxers.

During the war years metropolitan racing in Melbourne completely closed down for five years as Ascot racecourse was acquired by the army during the war years, but once the war ended there was talk of night trotting at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds.

As soon as it became obvious that night trotting was going to get the go ahead in Melbourne, Pearl created a small stable and home in Deer Park, not far from where her friend, the legendary George Gath, had established his powerful stable.

Pearl was super keen to have a runner at the renaissance of Trotting – the first ever night meeting at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds on 15th November, 1947.

The only problem was that this meeting was also a dream come true for every trotting man in Victoria as well as trainers from S.A., Tasmania and New South Wales seeking regular metropolitan stake races. An indicator of the interstate interest was that at the conclusion of the first season of night trotting nine of the top 17 stake winning owners were interstaters.

Pearl's lone nomination for the initial meeting, Alfred Dalla, was balloted out from the inaugural meeting and it was not until the fourth meeting on 13th December 1947 that Pearl was listed in the racebook as the trainer of

a starter. Although Alfred Dalla finished last it rekindled Pearl's interest and created a burning desire to train a Melbourne Showgrounds winner.

Alfred Dalla was not good enough but in 1948 she added Black Rajah, then a filly named Poise who made her debut as a two-year-old and the following seasons as a three-year-old competed in a heat of Victoria Derby at the Showgrounds against the colts, as there was no Victoria Oaks at the time.

The gamebreaker, however, was a trotting mare named NewWheat (New Derby – Minyip Myrtle) who Pearl broke in and educated. He won three races in the 1953/54 season, the first of which prompted Bruce Skeggs to write in the Argus, "When New Wheat won the Kialla Trotters' Handicap she ended a long run of unlucky defeats for veteran woman trainer Mrs. Pearl Kelly. Mrs. Kelly, one of three women to hold a trainer's licence in this State, has been driving and training trotters since 1913. Mrs. Kelly piloted trotters to victory until 1932, when woman drivers were barred. However, she was successful in women's events at the Royal Show up till 1939."

NewWheat worked through the classes in the country and was a regular at the Showgrounds from 1955 onwards but it took an eternity for him to break through against what was a stellar group of trotters that included the likes of Carlotta's Pride, Don't Enquire and Carl Louis.

In 1957 Charles Kelly (Dick Cullen) made the sports pages again when his boxing protégé Dick White won the Australian bantamweight title at the old Brisbane stadium defeating Sydney's Kevin James, trained by Ern McQuillen.

Not to be outdone Pearl was back in the news when the Trotting Control Board out of the blue decided to put on an exhibition race in 1958 for the women at the Showgrounds over one mile with a moving start, the 64-year-old Pearl was encouraged and inspired to take part despite her vision being in a terrible state.

The exhibition on 22nd March 1958 with no betting was won by Dorrie Simons on Bold Joe, defeating Pearl Kelly (Malvern's Hope), Mrs K Harper (Our Pam), Mrs V Parker (Pinup Girl) and Margaret Scull (Whispering Sands).

In 1957 Pearl passed ownership of NewWheat over to close friend Mrs Mary O'Dwyer (Dwyer), but still maintained control over the trotter's training.

Pearl's perseverance eventually paid off on November 1st 1958 when the now 10-year-old NewWheat, with George Gath handling the driving duties, led throughout to defeat black type trotters Apepa and Bold Brigade.

Placed behind Carlotta's Pride and Apepa at its next two starts, NewWheat was racing in career best form and won his second metropolitan race with



George Gath on 6th December with the Australian Trotting Record reporting that "Mrs Pearl Kelly was present after her recent illness to see the daughter of New Derby and Minyip Myrtle win."

Another of her more prominent winners in the twilight of Pearl's training career was the trotting entire Harmedor who won the 1959 Shepparton Cup and later sired Kevin Murray's G1 winning trotting mare Silken (Australasian Trotters Championship).

There was some sad news though that same year when Pearl's husband Dick passed away in Queensland and a photograph of his grave at Towong is among the National Library archives.

Pearl befriended many people and one couple that she embraced was a young Dorothea and Martin Zerafa, who helped her in her final years with Minyip Wheat and New Wheat.

Pearl taught Martin how to shoe horses and was an absolute perfectionist in advising him how to get the horseshoe angles and toe weights spot on. Pearl welcomed Martin and Dorothea's friendship and assistance as her eyesight and arthritis made it impossible for her to physically shoe the horses herself.

The last season that trotters from the Pearl Kelly competed was the 1961/62 season and at the first Victorian meeting of the season at Stawell, Pearl's Minyip Wheat was successful in the trotters event. There was far greater significance than this being a winner at the first meeting of the season because handling the reins was the diminutive teenager Brian Gath and this







was his first ever success as a trotting driver.

More success was to follow. New Wheat may have provided Pearl with her first Showgrounds metropolitan winner in 1958 but it also provided her with her last, three years later years later when, as a 13-year-old, New Wheat (now raced by Pearl and her brother Chris) won at the opening meeting of the 1961/62 season at the Melbourne Showgrounds with George Gath aboard. When her mother Sarah passed away a few months later (April 1962), Pearl decided to hand in her training licence but remained willing to pass on advice to newcomers.

Operated on for cancer of the bowel in 1968, Pearl just kept on fighting adversity having been moulded, as so many were, by the Great Depression. Even though here eyesight continued to deteriorate going she took great delight with the re-introduction of reinswomen's exhibitions in South Australia in 1970.

Held on South Australian Oaks night, Dorrie Simons won the first two with Plebes Idol and Fos, local Sandra Hutchison the third with Karomin before the inaugural S.A. Reinswomen's Championship at Globe Derby Park in 1973.

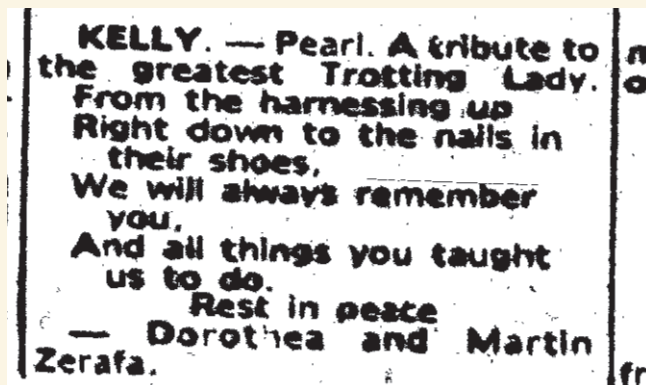
The brainchild of current Harness Racing International subscriber Ray Chaplin, who was then the SATC Promotions Manager, the 1973 Championship on May 19th was the first TAB betting race with women competing.

Thirteen months later the Trotting Control Board in Victoria programmed two women's races on successive Saturday nights, a move that did not sit well with Australian Trotting Register columnist Gordon Lockman who wrote: "Womens Lib, has, perhaps, gone too far with the introduction of Lady Drivers events with full prizemoney, TAB coverage and on-course betting at the Melbourne Showgrounds on June 6 and June 13, 1974. Next we will have Germaine Greer on the TCB." Judi Hargreaves, daughter of Jack Hargreaves (of Adaptor fame) won the first one on Youdini, with Sue Pattison (married name Morgan) second on Truant Armagh and Dorrie Simons third on Hazel Hall.

The following week Dorrie Simons won on Youcro Bay, defeating West Australian reinswoman Lyn Sweetman (married name Bauskis) on Elswood Connie with Margaret Frost third on Maisie Monarch.

There was now momentum in the move for women to become licensed but some male participants and almost the entire realm male officialdom, especially the stewards, resisted until the bitter end.

An example of the opposition was the outburst by Queensland Professional Trotting Horseman's Association President George Elliott who said, "that women racing against men was taboo". The QPHTA subsequently voted unanimously not to compete in races against women. Pearl had at least lived to see the day when women had been allowed back on the racetrack not only to compete amongst themselves but thanks to NSW Premier Neville Wran's Equal Opportunity legislation, also against the men. According to her medical records Pearl suffered a stroke in 1977 and thereafter she was transferred to Mount Royal Hospital where she died on 2nd July, 1982 from pneumonia, aged 88 years. That anyone could have maintained an interest after facing so many hurdles is simply beyond belief. That she was the first ever woman to win against the men at a metropolitan meeting (Perth – 1913), the first to win against the men in Melbourne (1916), competed in the first betting race for



women riders (Adelaide – 1935), drove in the first exhibition for women at the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds in 1958 at the age of 64 years and trained her last metropolitan winner at the age of 67 years – mind you 48 years after her first win as a trainer – truly elevates her to legend status.

Just two tributes appeared in the "Argus" Newspaper after her death, one from Bill and Margaret Stephens that provided a touching insight into her last years – "Goodbye dear friend. It has been a long sad trial these past years. Peace at last. Forever remembered." - and another one that paid tribute to the Greatest Trotting Lady. And so say all of us. HRI



## PEARL KELLY AWARD

The Pearl Kelly Award was developed by the Angelique Club as a means of recognising the contribution of women in harness racing. All credit to them.

Nominations are assessed according to five key criteria: 1) participation in the industry over a sustained period; 2) high achievement over a sustained period, or the creation of a first for women in the industry; 3) enhancement of the role of women in harness racing; 4) the creation of opportunities for others; and 5) service as a role model for others.

Winners of the Pearl Kelly Award have been Dianne Davies (1999), Kaye Matthews and Roma Pocock (2000), Kerry Manning (2001), Jayne Davies (2002), Elizabeth Clarke (2003), Debbie Quinlan (2004), Kylie Harrison (2005), Jodi Quinlan (2006), Lorraine Duffy (2007), Tanya McDermott (2008) and D'Arne Bellman (2009).

As the race programmer at Harness Racing Victoria in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I introduced many new feature races for mares/fillies and one of them was the Pearl Kelly, however, after three years, the incoming Chairman Ian McEwen decided that Pearl was of no account – or as he often said, "Harness Racing in Victoria didn't really exist until I arrived" – and so instructed the race name be changed to the Blossom Lady.

Surely now is the time for a place to be found for a permanent racetrack reminder of the legendary Pearl Kelly for the general public.