

## Ray Fitzpatrick

I was born in Oberon in 1949. My father was John Fitzpatrick, known as Jack, and my mother was Mavis Fitzpatrick (born Mavis Booth). My parents had nine children – Fay, Colleen, Gary, Helen, Ray, John, Maureen, Peter and Bryce.

My father come to Oberon from Katoomba when he was quite young. His first job was trapping rabbits and then he became a pea grower. Later he cleared all the country on the left-hand side of the Black Springs Road right out to the Essington turn. Then he was going to buy a property at Edith but he was having trouble getting the money. He went to see a man by the name of Richard Dixon, who said, “You give me 10 pounds and I'll get it through for you. What I do, I give the 10 pounds to the Lands Department. They put yours from the bottom to the top and then you're through pretty quick.”



I went to school at St Joseph's in Oberon on the school bus. I left school when I turned 15, when my father bought a property up at Gingkin. I was very happy because I hated every day of school. My brother John and I worked up there for many years. We bought it 1966 for 14,000 pounds, just before decimal currency came in, and we had it up until about 1983. Its name was Carinia but we used to call it Sparks's, as that's the people we bought it from.



### St Joseph's 5 stone team

**Back row L to R:** Ray Ftzpatrick, Noel Dowler, Peter Slattery, David Slattery, Michael Foley, John Hill

**Front Row L to R:** Noel McGrath, John Fitzpatrick, Grahame Hughes, Peter Hanrahan, Robbie Burton, Kenny Reynolds.

John and I worked at Lochgary( the family property) and we leased properties all over the place - Georges Plains, Limekilns, Black Springs and Essington. At one stage we had 10,000 merino sheep and now we don't own one. We only have cross-breed sheep now. We continued on farming, doing everything, and then all of us Fitzpatrick boys – Ray, John, Peter and Bryce - began working together, and we worked together for 40 years. We've been truck drivers, contract fencers and done hay bale contracting. It was only last year we stopped doing contract fencing.

We used to ringbark trees up at Gingkin, and we'd be down on our knees from the top side and up above our shoulders on the bottom side. That tells you how steep the country was. The worst part about it was we did hundreds of acres of it and then in another couple of years we pushed it all down with the bulldozer, so we should have pushed it down with the bulldozer in the first place.

I've had a couple of lucky escapes on the bulldozer. I tipped a big bulldozer over up at Gingkin. It went from its tracks to its roof in one quick easy movement. There were two dozers, the one I was driving and another one. We pushed the timber in and came back out. Then a log rolled out so I pushed it back in and then I was just backing out - the next minute I was on the roof. She just flipped straight over. I got covered in acid - the seat fell forward into the batteries. The next day the pair of overalls I had on fell off me because the acid burnt all through them.



I've been driving bulldozers for 40 years and I'm still actually driving. I'm building dams and things out at Isabella at the moment, so you keep working, you don't stop. I've got to do hay baling soon and then shearing's coming up. We've just finished marking lambs and now we're drenching sheep, and then we've got to mark all the calves. So we don't have a lot of time off but I'm too stupid to do anything else so I've got to stick with farming until such time as I can't do it.

Our neighbours at Gingkin were the Hughes family. The Hughes boys, Bob and Bill, used to walk about 700 metres down to the Hollanders River where they would get about a pennyweight of gold every week or two weeks, enough to just keep them fed.

Bob Hughes (senior) was one of the greatest bushmen you've ever seen. He would see a wombat and if that wombat was dead, he would say, "As soon as that wombat rots, I'll catch that dog." We had a property down at Rydal and dogs had come in and were killing our sheep. We went down one afternoon and we shot one dog and it was identical to a dingo. We brought it back to Bob Hughes and he said, "It's not a pure dingo because it's got floppy ears." A pure dingo has straight ears.

When we were young we had an old home on Lochgary and my father said, "You could use that as a youth club house if you want to." So we started the Edith Youth Club. We had 30 odd members and we used to hold a dance at the Edith Hall once a month or once every six weeks. We used to collect money and do things with it. We'd do up the clubhouse and we'd go down the Mountains for a weekend. We used to go up to Gingkin to our property and go swimming and

caving and we used to enjoy ourselves. We didn't have an iPad and we had to make our own entertainment.

We had really good dances at Edith. I was nearly always on the door, collecting the money. A lot of people used to come just to have a fight. We had a bloke by the name of Chris Ryan who used to come out, and if anyone was causing trouble he used to look after it for us. One night one real idiot of a man wanted to fight everyone. Chris said, "Well, don't worry about everyone. Just come up." He went up and of course Chris belted him and then he made him walk backwards down the road.

We used to have Pat Foran play, he had a band of his own. Then my brother John married one of his daughters so we used to see Pat fairly often, playing his piano accordion. Ray Callaghan used to play with Pat Foran at times, and his wife Maureen sang occasionally. We finished the youth club when everyone sort of left and got married and disappeared around different areas.

I played tennis at Edith when Dick and Thelma Young used to run the competition. There used to be anywhere up to 20 or 30 people at the Edith Courts and we used to play there every Sunday for a while. I played a lot of squash in Bathurst and in Oberon.

In my early days Oberon was classed as the town of tragedies because of the amount of young people that were killed in car accidents. There was three down at the Duckmaloi River on the Sydney Road, two near Midlands, out on the Black Springs Road, another two on the Bathurst Road. That was all within a few months. Before seatbelts, it was a serious problem. Many people we knew got killed in car accidents. A few were not killed but seriously damaged so that they couldn't do anything.

I got married when I was 27 and we had four children - three boys and one girl. They've all now grown up. I have one in Brisbane, one in Newcastle, one in Bathurst and one at O'Connell - they're scattered about. I have seven grandchildren - five boys and two girls. They're all between ten and two.

I wouldn't have been past Tarana, only for my children being very good sports people. I took my daughter to New Zealand playing soccer, one son I took to Fiji playing soccer. Another son I took to England playing soccer, and then I took him to China playing soccer. So that's my world trips - always happy to come home. When I go for a holiday anywhere, I'm always happy to come home.

I've been a volunteer firefighter for about just on 50 years at the Edith Brigade. I've been captain for the last 30 years. I was president of the Edith Recreation Ground for 30 years and I'm still doing that. With these jobs now you've got to die to get out of them. I'm a vice president of the wind tower association (OAWT) in which we try and stop them from ruining our Oberon countryside. They're doing their best to take over but we have so many farmers and landholders now that won't sign anything, which is the greatest thing. But they could also be like the Victorian government and just legislate and then we have no choices. But we're doing our best. It costs a lot of money but we have Mayfield doing most of the heavy lifting. Mayfield's son-in-law is doing all the work and he's full-time at it, trying to stop the wind towers. But we just got to wait and see, keep having meetings and keep getting the people interested in seeing what they will do to the countryside if they do come.

My brother-in-law Martin Humphries and I ran the fat lamb section of the Oberon Show. We used to have the yards built underneath some big pine trees in the showground. When my brother-in-law died, myself and a woman by the name of Joanne Harrison took over. We ran it for a few years and then I ran it myself, with just a bit of help, for another few years. Then I retired from

that because there was too much work attached to it. Now it only happens sometimes, not every year but we're hoping to get it back every year because Oberon is renowned for its fat lambs.

When we were young Oberon was a terrific community. You could just go to the pub or anywhere and leave your car with the windows down, the wallet on the top and the keys in it. And it would be still there. If it happened to rain and you had your window down, someone wound it up, and that was it. But now you wouldn't be going anywhere without locking your car and taking the keys. A different time now. We all did lots of different things, like played sport and went to different places when we had the Youth Club.

At this particular time, I'm a stranger in my own hometown because 90 percent of the people that were my age have died. I know 95 percent of the people in the lawn cemetery in Oberon. It's just life as it goes.

I'm hoping that my grandkids have a good life and can keep going without a big war or something happening that might create trouble for all the young people. I'm too old now to go, but I do think that it wouldn't hurt all of the Australian young people from 18 up to have 12 months military service to give them a bit of discipline.

My father lived and worked until he was about 75 and then he became pretty ill. He had a brain tumour, and died when he was 76. My brother Gary is also deceased - he was 66 when he died. My mother continued to live for another 20 something years and she died when she was 92. So I'm now trying to beat my father and catch up to my mother.



Some of the Fitzpatrick clan at Lochgary

As a family every year for the last 30 years or more we have had Christmas Day at Lochgary, we've had New Year's Day at Lochgary and we've had Easter at Lochgary. It doesn't matter wherever else we've had it - Gary used to own a motel in Bathurst and we had it there - but it

was never the same. We had it at Gary's property in Rockley and it was never the same. It was always best at Lochgary.



Lochgarry gate decorated for Christmas by Bryce and Tracey Fitzpatrick



At the end of last year they decided to sell Lochgary, our home property. Now we still have the land belonging to me and John, and also a couple of leased properties. We still run 3,000 acres so we've got a bit to keep us busy.

I've been here in the Oberon district ever since I was born and I haven't found a better spot to live. They'll cart me out in a cardboard box, out of my house if possible. We'll never leave Oberon - that's where we were born and bred so I'll die here. I have had a terrific life and I've only been in hospital for one week in 75 years.

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