

Outback driller left his mark

Ian McRae Barton

Founder, Bardrill Corporation

Born: June 26, 1933; Adelaide

Died: October 25, 2004; Adelaide

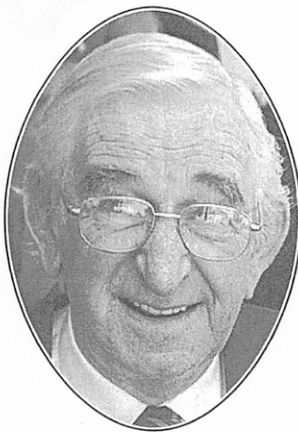
IAN Barton was a larger than life character and a big achiever. From a 17-year-old outback stockman he went on to become the founder of Bardrill Corporation Ltd – a small water-well drilling business which grew into a major earthmoving company employing about 130 staff.

His lifelong interest in horses saw him establish a racehorse stud, Kanowna, at Echunga, and become a sponsor of the Balaclava and Mindarie-Haildon race meetings.

Ian Barton grew up at Erindale. Aged 17, he went bush and for six years worked as a stockman at Victoria River Downs Station in the North Territory. He then became manager of a station near Alice Springs before buying Philip Creek Station, near Tennant Creek.

In 1963, he sold the station and returned to Adelaide working in various jobs until setting up a water well-drilling business.

"I started off in the Cooper's Creek area drilling some holes for the Kidmans," Ian once said in an interview. "It was in the middle of a drought and they wanted six holes drilled in a great hurry. I thought I'd



be there for about three months. I ended up drilling about 27 wells for them, and then some oil companies asked if I'd go ahead of their oil searches and drill for water for their teams. It never stopped, really."

David Brooker, now general manager of Bardrill Corporation, first met Ian Barton in outback South Australia in 1966.

"Ian worked hard and played hard,"

David Brooker says. "In his early days in the bush he dressed in old, worn-out clothes. With frayed collars and holes everywhere. His safety boots were a pair of thongs and he slept under the stars in a swag.

"How he ran that rig on his own I'll never know. Some of the tools he used two men couldn't lift, but he managed on his own.

"After the big floods hit Moomba in 1974, Ian found himself running a Kangaroo Island sheep property.

"He also decided to try his hand at breeding race horses with a stallion called Herzio. From there his great passion for breeding took off. Like everything he did in life there were no half measures."

From the few horses Ian Barton first ran at Kanowna, a major operation grew – at one time the property was home to more than 60 brood mares, foals and racehorses.

By early 1975, Moomba had started to dry out and Ian found himself back drilling water wells. It wasn't long before he saw an opportunity to expand from just a water well driller. He started to hire out labourers, bought a few Toyotas to hire out and forklifts to work in the Santos pipe yards. A big break came in the early '80s when he bought his first grader and from that time his company, Bardrill, grew.

He is survived by his wife Ann. A son, Shem, predeceased him.