

Musician had community at heart

Lyall Kenneth Kerr Harfull

Chaff miller, farmer, musician

Born: November 30, 1919; Mil Lel

Died: August 5, 2006; Mt Gambier



A DESCENDANT of pioneering settlers who were among the first to take up land at Mil Lel near Mt Gambier, in the 1860s, Lyall Harfull was widely respected in his community as a farmer, musician and a man of integrity and honesty.

At the age of 12, he left school and started earning money with his own team of Clydesdale horses, ploughing land, and sowing and harvesting crops. Inventive like many farmers, he built a tractor out of an old car and binder parts in his late teens. He was also very good at shaping wood with an adze – a throwback to his Grandfather Harfull, who was a shipwright's sawyer in the navy dockyards in Portsmouth, England.

Lyall joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1942 and served as an aircraft engineer at Mallala. He trained in Melbourne where he met his wife, Elaine, while celebrating with friends at Luna Park, on the day he “passed out” with flight engineer qualifications.

His first date with Elaine was a trip to the Puffing Billy scenic steam railway – a taste of things to come, with Lyall maintaining a lifelong interest in all things powered by steam. He later gained qualifications to drive

a steam traction engine or a small locomotive, and gave threshing demonstrations with his 1908 Fowler engine at shows and special events in the Mt Gambier district.

Lyall and Elaine celebrated their 60th anniversary earlier this year. They lived all their married life in the same house at Mil Lel, where they raised four children and ran a dairy enterprise before setting up a commercial chaff mill, Harfull and Son, in the late

1970s. In a wonderful combination of business and pleasure, the mill was powered by the Fowler engine until 1992, likely making it the last commercial farming enterprise in Australia to use a steam-traction engine on a regular basis.

Music was a big part of Lyall's life. He started to play for dances aged 11, when the musicians did not show up to a school dance. Apparently it was suggested Lyall could play instead, so someone went home for his button accordion and he provided music for about three hours.

He and his elder brother, Ross, went on to become well known all over the district for playing at dances. When World War II started, they were invited to join a concert party which travelled by bus from Dartmoor to Glencoe and Kalangadoo to raise money for the Red Cross. They played reels and jigs as part of the act. Some years ago, Lyall was interviewed and recorded traditional dance tunes for the National Sound Archives.

Lyall served more than 15 years on the Grant High School Council in Mt Gambier and devoted many years to the South-East Dairyfarmers Association. He also served on the board of management of the Mt Gambier Presbyterian Church.

He is survived by Elaine, their four children – Roger, Valerie, Elizabeth and Fiona – four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.