

Origins of the Cell Door

The door to the cell in which Ned Kelly and his gang incarcerated Senior Constable Devine and Constable Richards when they raided Jerilderie on 8, 9 & 10 February 1879 was purchased from Mr Valentine (Val) Thomas Chapman, in September 1988.

This article explains how and why the cell door came to be in Val Chapman's possession. In doing so it is necessary to refer to Val's parents, when they came to Jerilderie, where they initially lived, what his father's occupation was, and where he was employed.

According to the obituary printed in the *Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser* on 28 August 1947 Val's father, Jesse Frederick (Fred) Chapman, was born in the Echuca district in 1858 and for a time lived and worked in and around Orange before coming to the Jerilderie district in the 1870's, where he worked on various district properties, including Hartwood Station. The obituary notice states:-

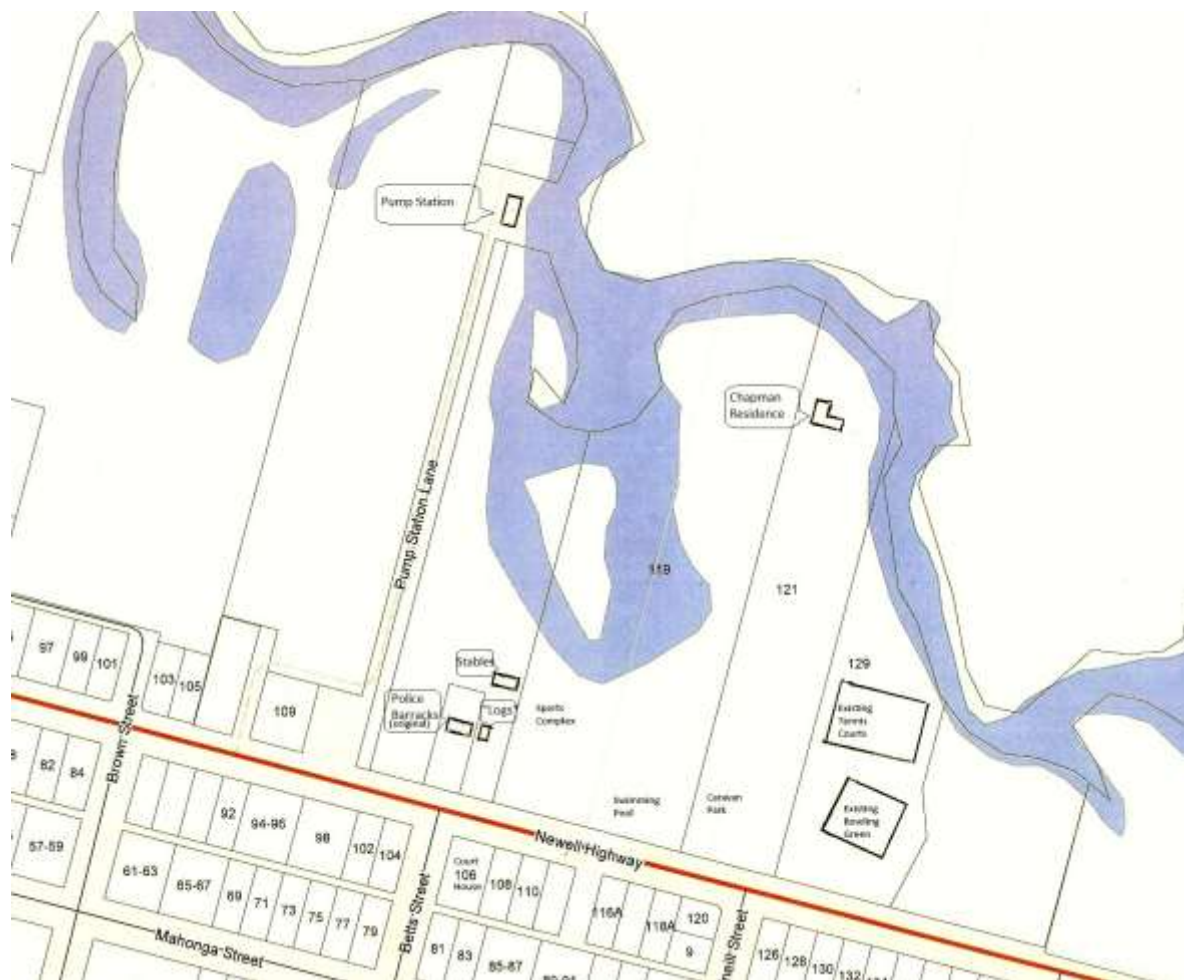
"When the town was reticulated about 1894, deceased was the first Engineer appointed in charge of the pumping station, and held that position until he retired about 11 years ago. In those days a small steam plant provided the supplies for the town. Subsequently a suction gas plant was installed and electric light was laid on to the town.

"He [Fred] was little short of a mechanical genius and controlled the pumping plant for years effecting his own repairs. In his workshop at the waterworks he had a lathe built by himself and carried out all kinds of work in a manner that displayed craftsmanship beyond compare. As a gunsmith he had no equal and no problem was too intricate for him to solve. It is not generally known now, [in 1947] but in the early days of the old Municipal Council there was no civil engineer and the services of Mr Chapman were requisitioned for the supervision and designing of road work, culverts, drains, etc., and such was his remarkable engineering knowledge that he was never at a loss in any direction that his services were required. He was even possessed of a theodolite which he had made himself."

The lathe mentioned in the obituary was also acquired by the Jerilderie Museum from Val Chapman, and is one of the local exhibits on display. In 1920 a Mr W W McSkimming came to Jerilderie to install in the local hospital *"the most powerful Roentgen apparatus [X-Ray machine] there is outside the State capitals."* During his visit to the town Mr McSkimming was so enamoured of the modern outlook displayed by the Jerilderie inhabitants that he was moved to write an article on his observations, which subsequently appeared in the March 1, 1921 issue of the **Sea, Land and Air** magazine. In that article Mr McSkimming describes Mr Fred Chapman as *"a man with an almost uncanny creative power. He has also built himself a lathe from old scraps of bicycles and iron piping. The gears are made from*

old bicycle chains and cogs, the fly wheels from blocks of wood, yet it is driven by a home-made steam engine, and on it he does screw cutting and precision work.”

One could form the opinion from the forgoing descriptions of Fred Chapman that he was somewhat of a ‘collector’, with a flair for making something out of nothing; the theodolite that he made from a gun sight being a perfect example. Such a trait lends credibility to how Mr Chapman, and then his son Val, came into possession of the cell door from the original police lock-up – or “logs” as it was known at the time – particularly when it is revealed that Val Chapman inherited all or most of his father’s “traits”, and also when it is known where Mr Chapman Snr worked and lived, as the following map shows.



When conditions suited, Mr Chapman Snr was known to row his boat to work, otherwise he followed the creek, walking behind the old police barracks which by this time in 1894 had been converted to the police sergeant’s residence.

In fact, following the raid on Jerilderie by Ned Kelly and his gang in February 1879 plans were put in place to strengthen the police presence in Jerilderie, which involved the construction of new police barracks and lock-up at a new location closer

to the town centre, a task completed in 1882. (Note. This police station, with subsequent renovations and additions was replaced by the current (2010) police station, on the same site, in 1989.)

William Elliott's account **The Kelly Raid on Jerilderie, by "One Who was There"** first published in serial form in his **Jerilderie Herald and Urana Advertiser** during 1913-14 describes the lock-up, or "logs" in great detail and refers to the cell door thus: *"The only light to the compartment [lock-up] was through an aperture in the massive door in the west, about ten inches square, through which the prisoners were passed their food and water."* Elliott goes on to state [in 1913] *"The old 'logs', long since the days of which I write, have given place to the present brick buildings, with their concrete floors to the cells, and built nearer the centre of the population of the town."*

William Elliott also describes the isolation of the police barracks from the rest of the town as being situated *"...at the eastern extremity of the town, fully half a mile from the post office. There were few buildings, in fact none at all, within the last quarter of a mile between the barracks and the town, which did not extend eastward beyond Bolton Street..."*

Therefore it is reasonable to assume that prior to the construction of the pumping station and water tower for the town water supply in 1894, very few buildings existed east of Bolton Street, apart from the 1882 police station and cells, and the old barracks that had been converted to the police sergeant's residence. Again, knowing the nature of Mr Chapman Snr, it would also be reasonable to assume that in his fossicking around for materials to adapt and re-use Mr Chapman stumbled across the cell door lying among the debris at the rear of the sergeant's residence. Alternatively, the police sergeant at the time may have simply given it to Mr Chapman Snr to do with it as he wished.

The old pump station demolished
in 1964



Chapman residence surrounded
by floods in 1931



Mr Chapman Snr continued in the employ of the local Council as Manager of the town's water supply, and as from 1925 the role of managing the town's electricity supply were added to his list of duties. He fulfilled this role until his retirement in 1937, whereupon one of his sons, Valentine Chapman took over the position. Val

continued in this role, although in somewhat of a different capacity, firstly as Manager of Council's Electricity Department from 1948 when bulk electricity was supplied from Victoria, and the commencement of extension of supply to rural properties. Then from 1958 with the advent of County Councils Val Chapman continued in a dual role as an employee of the local Council responsible for water supply (until 1979), and as the District Engineer for the Murray River County Council Electricity supply, until his retirement from that organisation in 1970.

As previously mentioned Val Chapman was imbued with the same desire to collect, restore, and to fashion things out of nothing. Some photographs of his restoration projects are appended to this article, but above all, Val was instilled with a true pioneering spirit, as evidenced by his commencement of regularly showing pictures in Jerilderie as from 1923 until 1953, including the branching out to show films at the nearby towns of Berrigan and Finley, and becoming a licensed aeroplane pilot in 1930 (licence No. 272).

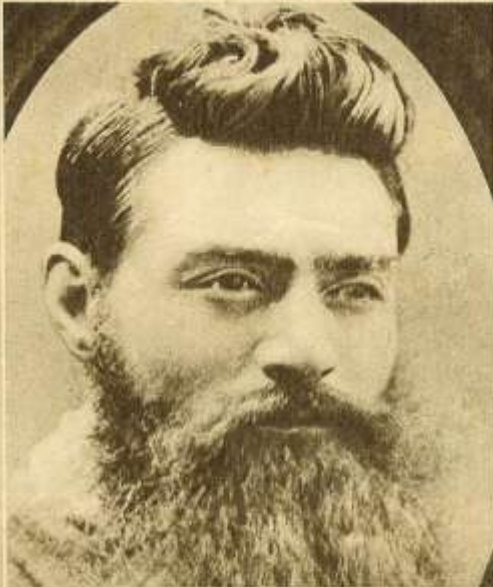
An early plane belonging to Val Chapman



Val's possession of the original lock-up cell door relating to the raid on Jerilderie by Ned Kelly and his gang first became generally known to the wider public when an article appeared in Modern Motor magazine in 1954. That article was reproduced in their February issue of 1962, and is reproduced as an attachment to this article.

Note. In 1985 the Jerilderie District Historical Society received notification of a Federal Government Bi-Centenary Grant to carry out renovations and extensions to the Museum, which included the construction of the verandah at the rear of the Museum, overlooking the Billabong Creek. The verandah posts used are posts salvaged by Val Chapman when the original pump station was demolished in 1964.

A copy of the page from February 1962 **Modern Motor** magazine, (supplied by historical researcher John Lanser) depicting Val Chapman displaying the cell door from the Jerilderie Police Barracks Lock-up. Mr Chapman is standing adjacent to the pump station, on the access road from the Newell Highway to the town's pump station and electricity supply depot.



LEFT: Ned Kelly, the day before his hanging —photo from Victoria Police Museum in Melbourne. ABOVE: Ned's death mask — plaster cast kept at Canberra Institute of Anatomy . . . as inspiration to our Federal politicians?

Touring the **KELLY COUNTRY**

**In the tracks of
the Kelly Gang
through Victoria
and New South
Wales — by car**

NED KELLY and his gang have been riding again lately. On television screens throughout Australia and in the pages of Sydney's Sunday Telegraph they repeated the exploits that rocked the country 80-odd years ago and nettled the colonial governments of Victoria and New South Wales into offering the biggest reward ever put on a band of outlaws: £8000, dead or alive—equivalent to ten times that amount in present-day money! And even this was chicken-feed compared to what was spent on

IRON DOOR behind which Kellys locked up Jerilderie police—held by present owner Val Chapman.



Some photographs of Val Chapman's restored vehicles. Unfortunately there are no known photographs of Val's fully restored Ryan aeroplane, used by the RAAF for training purposes during World War Two. The plane and spares, were sold to an American collector.

Val Chapman and his fully restored 1913 Humbrette



Val Chapman and his 1925 Douglas motor cycle. Note the old pump station in the background



Val Chapman driving “Four Corners” presenter Caroline Jones in the Ned Kelly Centenary street parade, 1979



Val Chapman’s plane parked outside the General Store (now the site of Jerilderie IGA) – in readiness for ‘home deliveries’!



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Local Historian
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