HAROLD SNELL

a biography by

Val Fletcher & Kath Kneebone
This book is dedicated to those of Harold Snell’s descendants who never knew him.
CHAPTER ONE

Historically, the Snell name seems to have appeared at some time before the 11th century, as a family owning an estate called Guiting Grange in Gloucestershire, at a time when England contained three Kingdoms. From this point, they seem to have migrated northwards to the midlands, Lancashire and Yorkshire, to escape oppression by the Normans. By the 14th century, they had moved south to Wiltshire, Devon and into Cornwall. The name Snell has been spelt many different ways but was of Anglo Saxon derivation.

The Australian Snell family story started at a time of social upheaval in Britain, marked by the Industrial Revolution, the establishment of the enclosure system and rapid population growth. Machines were taking over the work of men and women, causing unemployment in farming communities. It was also the time of the ‘enclosures,’ where previously common land was seized by wealthy farmers, who then claimed sole ownership of the land, thus both displacing and disenfranchising villagers, who had used the land for grazing their livestock and growing crops. The Snell families of this era were farm labourers in Cornwall and unlike earlier times, when they had stable work and access to land, after the enclosures they were forced to hire themselves to the large land holders, at local fairs. This led to less stable incomes and the movement of families to ‘tied’ housing, owned by the land owner, where the workers paid rent, without securing tenure. The combination of all these events caused great hardship, to those who had not been able to retain land or work, within their original community.

In 1833, farm labourers’ wages were cut from 8 shillings a week to 7 shillings, causing further hardship and unrest across rural Britain. These difficult times gave rise to the first union movement, which caused further unrest in both the countryside and towns.

The 18th century had been a time of exploration so by the mid-19th century opportunities to escape the British problems were available. Thus the 19th century was a time of migration to places like South Africa, Canada, America, New Zealand and Australia.¹ These journeys were hazardous, with the destinations also posing unknown challenges on arrival. The

¹ Information from shipping lists.
colonies, established in Australia, through the transportation of convicts, were becoming very attractive to those free settlers brave enough to make the journey.

Richard Snell, our forbear, made this journey to Australia aged 19 years, in 1863, leaving England in April and arriving in July that year. Richard had been employed as a groom, by the Rev. Nicholas Every, in the parish of St Kew, Cornwall. Richard’s wages would only have been about 10 shillings and 10 pence a week and much of these wages were usually then recouped by the employer for rent and food. Therefore, it must be assumed Richard’s employer was generous and either did not make these charges, or that he or another person helped Richard with the fare to Australia.

It seems that Richard came as an unassisted migrant, sailing in a ship called the Monarch, which arrived in Hobson’s Bay on the 27th July 1863, under Captain J.W. Gill. Some reports suggest that Richard disembarked at Portland. If so, he would have either walked or been taken by bullock cart the 60 miles to Hamilton. The voyage had been uneventful until a storm, 24th June, caused the ship to have little in the way of masts left; but was subsequently repaired with the help of both crew and passengers.

The Melbourne Argus reported the arrival of the Monarch on the 28th July, with a list of the cabin passenger names and noted there were 68 unnamed people, who travelled steerage. It appears that Richard was one of these. On the 3rd August, the Argus reported that the passengers were so grateful for Captain Gill’s sea-man-ship, that they held a dinner for him at Scott’s Hotel and presented him with an inscribed silver salver.

Richard’s parents, William Snell and Mary Ann Short, were married in Shaugh Prior in Devon, in 1833; their first three children being born at Merrymeet, Cornwall. Richard was the fourth child and he and several more seemed to have lived in housing on an estate. William and Mary Ann had eleven children of their own and adopted a baby named Thomas, born to a Harriet Snell, listed as a ‘single woman’.

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2 Shipping list, from Victorian Public Records Office.
3 Listed in the 1861 census for St Kew.
4 South Australian Register, 22nd August.
5 Parish Record of Baptisms for Merrymeet: 1835, 1838 and 1841.
6 Parish Record of Baptisms for Jobs 1843, 1846, 1849, 1850, 1852, 1854, 1856
7 Parish Register for Menheniot.1858) (The 1861 Census lists Thomas as 3 years and part of William and Mary Ann’s household.
Five of William and Mary Ann’s sons survived, Richard, John, James, William and Thomas. John became a Chief Constable, married Annie and had five children and lived in Lancashire. James became a mason in St Austell, Cornwall, where he married Jane, with whom he had six children. 8 William and Thomas also moved to Lancashire and became tailors.

William and Mary Ann moved several times, unlike William’s parents William and Elizabeth, who remained in Quethiock in Cornwall for most of their lives. Both William and his father William are listed as ‘agricultural laborers’. William senior’s parents, Hugh and Mary (nee Hambly) also had stable residence in Menheniot, where William was born in 1787. Hugh’s employment is listed as Yeoman, defined as one who works his own land or that of a Royal or Noble household. Hugh Snell’s baptism in 1741 lists his parents as Hugh and Mary, also. The continual reuse of Christian names in the Snell family causes some confusion, when trying to trace the family line.

When William died in 1889, Mary Ann moved north to Ashton-under-Lyne, in Lancashire, to live with their son, John. Mary Ann is listed as having ‘private means’ 9.

We know Richard worked as a labourer, as it is on his marriage register, when he married Louisa Lewis in 1865.10. Louisa is listed as a servant, aged 17 years (needing her father’s consent) and Richard was 22 years old. Family stories tell of Richard being known as Toby and having other nicknames, such as Bell Topper Toby and the Silver Fox. His son, Harold Sinclair, was known as the Red Fox. These names could allude to their hair colour, but may have other connotations, as well. The last few generations have been well-known for having dark hair, with white streaks, initially, and finally, having a full head of white hair. The males often had a tinge of red in their beards and moustaches.

Louisa’s parents, William and Mary Lewis, with Louisa and an elder daughter Eliza, migrated to Australia in 1848, from Somerset, on the barque Cheapside. They bought their precut home with them and erected it in Hamilton, in what is now known as Lewis St. It

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8 1891 Census
9 1891 Census.
10 Marriage register for the Wesleyan Church, Hamilton.
burned down some time in 1934.\textsuperscript{11} The property is now in the Gerdtz family, other descendants of William and Mary Lewis.\textsuperscript{12}

Following a 12 month contract, working for Mr. C H Armitage, William Lewis started a carrier business, between Hamilton, Portland and Port Fairy.\textsuperscript{13} William and Mary went on to have another six surviving children, several of whom settled as farmers in the Cavendish–Mooralla area.

By 1880, Richard’s name is on the Department of Lands and Survey map, as having selected several blocks of 300 acres, in the Parish of Mooralla. The 1889 map shows Richard selection of 669 acres and Louisa of 997 acres of land further north in the Parish of Lambruk. They ran flocks of sheep on these properties. Both of these Parishes are in the Shire of Dundas.

Victoria became a separate colony in 1851 and several Land Acts came into force. The first was the Nicholson’s Act, passed by the Victorian Government in 1860,\textsuperscript{15} the second, Duffy’s Act 1862 provided free selection before survey. The third, the Land and Pastoral Acts of 1869 was passed, consolidating and amending the previous Acts.

The original law still applied to all unoccupied Crown lands, but limited the selected area to 320 acres, to be held under license for three years. During this time, the selector must reside on the land, fence it and cultivate a certain proportion of it.

\textsuperscript{11} Hamilton Spectator.
\textsuperscript{12} Hamilton Spectator.
\textsuperscript{13} Hamilton Spectator
\textsuperscript{14} Photos courtesy of the Hamilton Historical Centre. Originals held by the Gerdtz Family
\textsuperscript{15} Year Book 1911 ABS.
According to Don Garden, the selection of land was a rather disorganized affair, where pastoralists often used ‘Dummies’ to bid for land, in order to retain the large estates on which they had squatted.\textsuperscript{16} Pastoralists with plenty of ready cash survived, but others ran themselves into irrecoverable debt when they bought back land from the dummy bidders.

The rush to purchase selections caused a huge influx of people to Hamilton. Garden quotes ‘many thousands’ arrived in the frenzy to acquire land. The sales were held in the Land Office yard, which was capable of holding 15,000 people. Richard must have been amazed at this land acquisitioning, when he arrived in Hamilton as a young man of 19 years, in 1863. How different it must have seemed, after the restrictive land system he had grown up with in Cornwall. However, he seems to have taken full advantage of the situation.

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\includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Richard_Snell.png} \hspace{0.1\textwidth} \includegraphics[width=0.4\textwidth]{Louisa_Snell.png}
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\begin{quote}
Louisa Snell nee Lewis \hspace{0.5\textwidth} Richard Henry Snell
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The 1903 census gives their official address as Brimpaen, with Richard’s profession as farmer and Louisa’s as home duties. The 1914 census finds them still at Brimpaen, but Richard is listed as ‘gentleman’. Richard and Louisa had twelve children, eleven living fairly long lives. Two of their daughters in particular: Lavinia lived to over 100 and Selina survived well into her nineties.

Richard returned to England in 1879 and again in 1905. On the 1\textsuperscript{st} May 1906 his travels were published. He described the journey on the \textit{Persic}, the places they visited on the way

\textsuperscript{16} Don Garden, \textit{Hamilton: A Western District History} (1984, Hargreen Publishers: North Melbourne)
and the amount of food needed to sustain the passengers and crew. He also wrote of how much he was enjoying his travels. While there, he was presumably visiting his brother John.

When his daughter Lavinia married Walter Payne, at the Snell property ‘Hillfill,’ Brimpaen, Richard was again away in England, so Lavinia was given away by her uncle George Lewis. Richard is reputed to have conned his daughters into washing the sheep, prior to shearing, on the promise of a trip to England. The girls woke one morning to find their father gone, taking his wool clip with him to England.

Louisa was a very capable woman, reputedly able to blade shear 80 sheep a day, as well as cook for the shearing teams and raise her family. She was also the local mid-wife. She seems to have stayed at home, tending to the family, the farm and the needs of the local women, while Richard went off travelling. After his death in 1915, Louisa moved back to Hamilton and lived in her old home in Lewis St.

Their third child, Harold Sinclair, born in 1870, the eldest surviving son, was a handsome young man who, besides working on the family farms, joined the local Rifle Club. He became a member of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, at some time after they were formed in 1885, under the leadership of a local jeweller, Captain W.G. Farroll. Some detachments of this organization served in the Boer War in South Africa, but it is unlikely that Harold did.

Harold Sinclair Snell in Victorian Mounted Rifles Uniform

The Hamilton detachment engaged in war games, when in 1887 it was rumoured the Russians and Chinese were so interested in the Western District, they had landed at Nelson,

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17 From Providence House, Ashton-under-Lyne,
18 Horsham Times 24th November 1905.
19 Horsham Times 4.11.1910.
on the South Australian border. The Mounted Rifles threw up earth works along the roads to Hamilton and a glorious defeat was declared. The incident is known as the ‘Dash for Hamilton’ and Harold’s part in this is also unknown although, if he was involved as a 17 year old, one can imagine he found it a great adventure.\textsuperscript{20} The 1890-1925 Department of Lands and Survey map shows Harold as being in possession of a portion of Richard’s land, in the Parish of Lambruk and several other properties at Mooralla. He added to his holdings by selection and purchase, the total being some 5,000 acres in the Mooralla and Cavendish areas. Another 4,000 acres were purchased at ‘Box Hill’, not far from Balmoral, along the banks of the Glenelg River.

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\caption{Emily Snell née Symons}
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In 1891 Harold married Emily Lydia Symons, whose father, John Symons, also held land in the Parish of Lambruk, not far from Richard Snell’s 1889 holdings. John Symons was married to Eleanor Pooley, in Hamilton and Emily’s birth is given as: Hamilton in 1870.

Harold and Emily had seven children, the eldest of whom was Ormond Harold Edward George, born in 1892. Their other children were Ivy, born 1894, who married Thomas Dark, lived at Cavendish and then retired to Hamilton. They had three children, Harold, Lloyd and Phyllis. Albert Henry was born in 1896, the twin girls came next, Emily and Muriel. Emily married Tom Killen and had four children: Norman, Nolan, Lindsay and Doreen. Muriel married Charles Plunkett and eventually moved to Ararat and had nine children: Ormond,

\textsuperscript{20} D Garden 1984, Hamilton: A Western District History; Hamilton Spectator 1887.
Irene (Jean), Coral, Dulcie, Raymond, Bertha (Joyce), Noreen, Audrey and Shirley. The youngest son of Harold and Emily, Raymond, married Ivy Alexander and settled in Warrnambool where they had three children: Nolan, Elaine and Julie.

Harold is reported, in a book of early pioneer families of Victoria and Riverina,$^{21}$ to have been active in matters of ‘local and public welfare’. He acted as chair for the Victorian Producers’ Association and was a member of the School Committee and Board of Advice; presumably this was at the Cavendish Primary School.

Another of Richard and Louisa’s sons, William Albert, is famous for riding his bicycle across the Nullarbor from Menzies, Western Australia to Cavendish, Victoria, in 1897. This was accomplished in 27 days, via tracks hardened by camels and through virgin scrub and desert. The purpose of the trip was twofold: to look for good grazing land and also to marry his childhood sweetheart, Mary Jane Duncan. A news article gives his description of the ride, as far as Adelaide, and states his intention to sail back to the West with his bride, but H.M. Bremner states he rode his trusty Rover Road Racer back to Menzies, while Mary Jane went by sea. Several of his sisters also went to the West, where they settled and married. William went on to become Mayor of Leonora, where he introduced the first steam tram to the district.$^{22}$

![William Albert Snell](image)

British Columbia for the rest of his life, although he returned to Australia briefly in 1905. During his life time he worked at farming and as an engineer for the Public Works Department BC. George and Mary Jane had two sons and five daughters.

George & Mary Jane (nee McLeod) Snell

Richard’s obituary states that, along with his travels to England, he also visited his children in Western Australia in 1915. His will provided for family in Australia and England. His son Albert and daughter Lavinia were charged with being his executors and overseeing the sale and distribution of his assets.

Richard Snell, his brothers, sons and grandsons all had the ability to see and make the most of life’s opportunities, they were intrepid travellers and pioneers. They achieved much, sometimes in the harshest of climates, supported by strong women, who were prepared to share the hard work.

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23 Sydney Morning Herald.
24 Prince George Citizen Newspaper, obituary, 26.11.1953.
25 Horsham Times 26.11.1915
CHAPTER TWO

Thousands of miles away from Victoria, isolated from Australia’s more populated areas, Darwin was the chief town in the Northern Territory. The Territory had changed from South Australian control to becoming a Commonwealth Territory on 1 January 1911. Previously, the homes of the administrative staff had been adjacent to the original landing place when Darwin (then named Palmerston) was settled. The new administration decided to extend Darwin’s boundaries by building new homes for its administrative staff on the bushland peninsula the Aborigines called “Myilly”. Another change was to build a Compound at Myilly Point and then to gather the Aborigines living in the bush and place them in this Compound under European supervision. A contract was awarded to a southern contractor, who brought with him his men and materials. Thus (Ormond) Harold Edward George Snell came to the Northern Territory.\textsuperscript{26}

The houses the Commonwealth built for their administrative servants at Myilly Point were as tropical as the conditions allowed at the time. Darwin had only a very limited electricity supply, provided by the private company, Holmes Estate, so no fans or other cooling devices were available. The government solution was to build the outside walls of the new houses with slats of timber with small spaces between them, to allow air to come into the house. You are right. They were not waterproof. There were two or three waterproof rooms in the centre of the houses and a waterproof kitchen in one corner.

\textsuperscript{26} Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 20.11.1913.
When Harold had completed this work, he did not return to the “South”. He had heard about Territory mining and joined Pearce and Party to mine tin at Maranboy. They owned the well-known *Star of the East* mine, one of the better tin-producing mines in the Territory.

World War 1 broke out in 1914 and Harold enlisted in 1915 as 7307, Sapper H. Snell, 4 Company, Australian Engineers, France. His mining partners, very generously, offered to take wages while he was away and split the rest into three and give his third to a local solicitor to hold for him. He served in Egypt and France and spent his leaves in England. On one of these, he meet munitions’ worker, Ivy Mary Allen, at a garden party. They were mutually attracted and kept in touch. Several leaves later he proposed and she accepted. He went back to France and war, happy. She began to have doubts:

“Australia is so far, far, far away. If I go out there, I’ll never see my family again. If I give this ring back to Harold, I’ll never see him again.”

The family won, and on his next leave she gave the ring back. But she did not know Harold. Before his next leave he wrote to her: “Could I just see you again. I won’t mention marriage.” But, when he returned to France, she was wearing his ring. Nevertheless, they had decided not to marry until “this war has ended”.

When it was over the Australian authorities could not repatriate all their soldiers at once. Harold applied for and obtained special leave. The newlyweds went to Jarrow-on-Tyne where Harold learnt new construction skills at a ship building and iron company. They returned to Australia on the *Konigan Luise* in 1919.

They were to live in Victoria “because it is more like England”. He left Ivy Mary with his family and returned to Darwin to sell his shares and collect his money. But the solicitor had left the Territory without leaving a forwarding address; and no one seemed to know where he was. Tin had been a good price during the war and his plans had been partly based on this money and on his saved army pay, also with the solicitor. Harold advised his family of his loss and went back to Maranboy to build a house for his new wife.

Harold had returned to Darwin in 1920. The ‘twenties’ were the years of steady progress before the advent of the 1930’s Depression: one that was not just a local Depression, but a world-wide Depression that would alter the world.
Ivy Mary was to find this new, isolated, tropical country, not only very strange, but frightening. The first meal the English wife of her husband’s partner baked, and she had thought was lamb, turned out to be goat. The first Aborigine she saw was a big man dressed only in a loin cloth who was winding a windlass to bring up pay-dirt.

But there were real tragedies also. When she was seven months pregnant, she travelled by bullock wagon to Pine Creek where a doctor was called from Darwin, travelling to her on a single, self-propelled railway vehicle. The baby was stillborn. The doctor advised that any action in a future pregnancy should be left until a later time. She obeyed. But she had malaria fever then and her husband nursed the tiny baby and obeyed doctor’s orders for the very short time their second son lived.

Harold sold his mining shares and house and purchased another home and building business in Darwin from builder, James Markey. For most of the rest of his life the family, Darwin and the building trade would be his lot. For all that, he never lost his interest in mining.\textsuperscript{27} Over the years he was a non-participating partner in Grove Hill mine and held shares in Pine Creek Enterprise Gold, Golden Dyke Gold Mine, Eleanor Gold Mining Co. and Vendors Gold. He would also ‘grub-stake’ mining prospectors. His shares were financially unrewarding but later, by buying up mining machinery, he was able to undertake excavation work in the Territory including the preparation for the oil tanks in the 1920s and 1930s, preparation of the site of the Armidale Street power house and excavation of the sites for the 6 inch gun emplacements before World War II.

These were also the years when Ivy Mary would receive fairly regular requests: “I have to see the Bank Manager, so do up my ‘whites’ please.” It was the custom then to wear formal

\textsuperscript{27} Northern Standard, 8.6.1937, 20.12.1933.
white suits with a white shirt and a black tie or bow-tie on such occasions. For work Harold wore only well-pressed long khaki pants and an open-neck shirt. This was a time in Darwin’s history when fashion and lifestyle attempted to mirror the British tropical-colonial style. It did not last for too long in Darwin.

Harold won the right to construct the R.S.S.A Club and Memorial Hall, his first major contract in Smith Street. Perhaps it was his status as a returned soldier that had influenced their decision. He was barely ready for constructing such a large building and needed to convey his materials and tools to the site. He piled them on to his cart and summoned the family’s Aboriginal “boy”, and together they pulled it to the building block. Nym resented the indignity:

“Me no all the same horse,” he grumbled.

But his boss insisted and the building was completed. The local paper reported:

The Soldier’s Hall will be officially opened on October 20. It is now nearing completion and reflects every credit on H. Snell and is a fine improvement to that part of town.28

It became the hub of official and private recreational activities. It was a Memorial Hall, but the town gradually forgot this, referring to it simply as the Soldiers’ Hall. But the land had

28 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 10/10/1922.
been donated by E.E. Jolly, a returned soldier, and it had been built by another returned man, H. Snell. The money raised was as a memorial to the fallen. The building had a central hall with an open twelve foot wide verandah on three sides where people sat before going to the dancing area. It also had a removable stage. One very big advantage was a set of windows above the dancing space which allowed air in on fine nights. In the second of two articles about Harold Snell, written by historians, P. & S. Forrest in the Northern Territory News in 2004, the following appears: ‘...he did design most of these structures as well as build them’.

An interesting contract was that of a house that still exists in Darwin today and is known there as Lyons’ Cottage. Nevertheless, H. Snell & Co. built it in 1924 for the Eastern Extension Cable Company, more popularly remembered as the British-Australia Telegraph or B.A.T., which had linked Australia to the world’s telegraph system. They were the elite of the town and the Manager’s home had to reflect this. It was ‘specially designed for the tropics’ and was built of stone with cypress pine floors and a slate roof. Cypress pine was grown in the Northern Territory and was impervious to white ants, but had to be obtained from a greater distance from Darwin. Snell’s company also erected extra buildings on the B.A.T.’s business blocks in Knuckey Street.29

There were War Service Homes to be built in the Territory; and H. Snell & Co. built the first two for Jim Young and Jack Burton.30 One of the contracts that was to be of benefit to Darwinians until the bombing of Darwin in World War II was the fencing in of a portion of the sea on Lameroo beach to form the Swimming Baths.

29 Northern Standard, 29.1.1926.
30 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 16.1.1924.
The better contracts were interspersed with more mundane work: new ceilings, fixing fire damage, building a drain across Knuckey Street, providing metal for the roads, erecting a tank stand, painting, additions, alterations, repairs, renovations, and building a concrete Strong Room at the Lands Office. No work was too big, too small or too trivial for Harold. He had promised his wife a trip back to England, but the loss of his wartime mining profits had delayed the trip. He needed all the money he could get. His friends advised him: “Don’t do it.”

“You know how homesick she is!”

“You’ll never see her or the children again.”

But a promise was a promise and by 1926 he booked their tickets to the ‘Old Country.’ The family (Ivy Mary and the two children: Valerie and Richard) enjoyed the trip: meeting aunts, uncles and grandma. Whether it was the prolonged wait for the trip or whether it was that she was missing Harold, Ivy Mary realised that, although she still loved her family over there, she was no longer an English woman but an Australian. (“Besides, if he can afford it once, perhaps he can afford it again.”). Her husband had built the Infectious Disease Complex at the first-built-hospital while she was away.

A regular source of construction work was repairing white ant damage. Such work remains a constant problem to this day; but in those days Darwin was so susceptible to the pests that pot plants were not planted into the ground but into tins. Whole houses were rendered useless. Even the Government Resident’s Home was repaired fairly regularly. H. Snell & Co. demolished and rebuilt several well-known sites under such headlines as “Landmark Disappearing,” including P.R. Allen & Company’s General Store, Luxton’s Store and “the Government Store at the Two-and-a-Half-Mile” (Parap). 31

Of course a more regular source of work was constructions of what was called in those days ‘cottages’; but which we would express today as ‘houses’. 32 They were probably the backbone of the construction industry.

By 1927 Harold was busy in Darwin, building two houses in Woods Street, one shop in Cavanagh Street and providing the Council with metal for the roads when he won a contract for bridge-work on the extension of the North Australian railway line from Emungalan to Birdum. The bridge-work was undertaken directly by the Commonwealth with day labour

31 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 1.4.1925, 29.1.1929, 20.11.1923; Northern Standard, 20.5.1927, 2.10.1931.
and piece work. Snell obtained contracts on the Katherine River Bridge and other bridge-work along the line.\textsuperscript{33}

Ivy Mary was pregnant again and was looking ‘poorly’ when Harold met Joe King, who told him that his parent’s rented house in Brisbane had lost its tenants. Harold made the decision that his wife and children would go to Brisbane by boat and he would travel overland in the Chevrolet in time for the birth. There were not many proper roads on such a trip, mainly bush tracks; and the petrol, water, tyres and some other spares would have to be taken with him; but that was the way of it at that time.

Marjory Hilda was born on time but, unfortunately, she had a hole in her heart.\textsuperscript{34} Today, that can be remedied but it was not so then. She lived for four months. Ivy Mary was distraught. She did not wish to return to Darwin. So Harold tendered for and won a contract to build a bridge over the Dawson River in Queensland. Baralaba was a small coal mining town and Queensland’s economy had begun to slide into depression earlier than the rest of Australia.\textsuperscript{35} The contrast between the local children’s toys and theirs made the two Snell children feel rich for the first and only time in their young lives. When the contract was completed the family with their possessions piled into the Chevrolet and travelled over prickly-pear infected country until they reached Townsville and the boat to take them back to Darwin, reaching there on 17 February 1931.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Northern Standard}, 25.3.1930.
In 1929 Harold had decided to undertake a private venture. He had bought a half-acre block of land and it was possible to build two buildings on it. There was only one open-air picture show building in the town, the Don. It consisted of a tin wall, a screen and deck-chairs. Harold now had new skills he had learnt at Jarrow-on-Tyne, in England: how to weld steel. He could construct an open-air picture show by building a two-storey building over quarter of the block with steel trusses holding up the roof. At the far end of this ‘half-block-section’ could be the screen with a tin wall joining the two. Two-thirds of the audience would thus be protected from rain and all would be cool in the tropical heat. Again, the electricity shortage would prevent any better arrangement. The town was delighted: ‘H. Snell is building a “New Picture Palace,”’ wrote the Northern Territory Times’.36

![Star Cinema under construction](image)

Looking back to it from the twenty-first century, however, the pattern of the seating in this new theatre reveals an aspect of Darwin’s 1920s and 1930s: racism. The Aborigines were seated directly in front of the screen, the mixed race people behind them and the Chinese at the back of the ground floor. Upstairs sat the Europeans with their children segregated in high-level ‘boxes’, at the back. Nevertheless, the venture was so successful that the theatre had to be extended as the population increased.37

Another aspect of the racism of the time was the relationship between Dr. Cook and a certain percentage of the local population. The Aborigines worked for the town people and had to return to the Compound by a certain time. They were allowed back to attend the

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36 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 26.7.1929.
picture show; but were not allowed to return to their employers’ premises. Some employers objected, apparently wishing to exploit their employees further. It became a newspaper campaign between the two groups.38

By the end of the 1920s, H. Snell & Co. was fairly secure and improving.

38 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 15.8.1927.
CHAPTER THREE

The 1920s had been times of prosperity and democracy. The League of Nations and its sanctions had been fairly successful. The 1930’s Depression, however, intervened. This was to be the most severe depression that the industrialised world has suffered. It occurred shortly after the United States’ Wall Street Crash in October 1929, with a sudden and general loss of confidence in the economic future; and it lasted nearly a decade.\(^\text{39}\) The failure of the United States of America to join the League of Nations and of other nations to support it in face of the Depression, in combination with Japan’s aggression in Manchuria [by then Japan’s Manchukuo] led to overseas’ reports and fears that “a grave extension of the [Manchurian] conflict…might draw European countries into war”.\(^\text{40}\)

The Australian Government had offered a £10,000 prize for the first flight from England to Australia to be completed in 30 days. Ross and Keith Smith, in their Vickers Vimy, won this prize in December 1919 when they landed in Darwin. In 1928, Bert Hinkler flew from England to Australia, and, following the same route, set down in Darwin in a little over half the time of the first flight. Charles Kingsford Smith was also a pioneer aviator who flew across the Pacific from America to Australia in 1928, again landing in Darwin. In 1930, he flew solo from London to Australia in approximately 10 days. All these airmen realised

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\(^{40}\) *Northern Standard*, 3.11.1931.
that Darwin was clearly the first Australian aerodrome: “the recognized airport for North Australia”.

In March 1932 the local paper reported:

Four units of Australian Air Force arrived on Saturday last and a fifth on Sunday afternoon. ...With the arrival of the seaplane, a German lady flyer and the French plane this afternoon, Darwin is certainly finding her place in the aviation world.

In 1932 a demonstration of stunt and formation flying took place in the vicinity of the jetty with eight machines in the air. Also a flight of 3 British Southampton flying boats and six Australian military planes had landed there. As early as 1932 it was reported that Darwin, “chief airport of the north”, was to be fortified with anti-aircraft guns “under plans now being carried out by the Commonwealth Government”.

H. Snell & Co. was busy despite the onset of the Depression. Darwin was in the course of another change that would enable some to suffer a little less from the Depression than the general public. In North Australia, at Thursday Island, there was a Naval Base, where naval ships could take on coal. To protect these ships, some military personnel and guns were stationed there. The Government decided that, in lieu, oil tanks would be erected in Darwin and the military and guns would also be transferred to Darwin. The growing importance of airways traffic may have been the reason for the shift or there may have been less room for expansion at Thursday Island?

It was decided to build these oil tanks into Stokes Hill, adjacent to the jetty. There was nobody in this small town with both the expertise and the facilities to construct these huge tanks; and the contract for the first tanks went overseas and the later ones were constructed by a large southern firm, Evans Deakin. The contract for the excavations and preparations of the seven sites, however, was won by Harold Snell’s firm. It has been mentioned that he had never lost his interest in mining and, as well, that he had done construction work on the bridges when the railway line was extended. He was knowledgeable about his Northern Territory. He knew where the necessary equipment to do the work was. The steam

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41 Northern Standard, 4.11.1932.
42 Northern Standard, 25.3.1932.
43 Northern Standard, 11.3.1932, 16.3.1932.
44 Northern Standard, 12.7.1932.
45 The News (Adelaide) i.6.1932.
46 Northern Standard, 25.8.1932, 2.12.1 932.
caterpillar and shovel, ‘that did such good work on the Katherine to Birdum railway construction’ and the ‘Ruston mechanical shovel’ are cases in point.\textsuperscript{48} The former was reconditioned at the Two-and-a-Half-Mile Loco Shop before being used on the oil tank excavations.\textsuperscript{49} This excavation work was completed by July 1935.\textsuperscript{50}

By September 1933 work had commenced on the Barracks area at Emery Point (Larrakeyah). In the meantime, troops were housed at the abandoned Vestey’s Meatworks where, at least there was sufficient water for them, but little else.

The erection of houses, stores, barracks, wireless transmission building, earth works as well as new buildings and alterations and extensions to existing buildings were part of the defence build-up of the late thirties and early forties. The Sergeants’ Mess, built by H. Snell & Co. at Larrakeyah Barracks still stands today.

\textsuperscript{48} Northern Standard, 2.10.1936; Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 15.5.1927.
\textsuperscript{49} Northern Standard, 18.11.1932, 1.11.1938.
\textsuperscript{50} Northern Standard, 12.7.1935.
In 1934 Snell built an oil storage depot for the Vacuum Oil Company.\textsuperscript{51} Snell & Co. had earlier obtained control over various agencies; but from 1937 there was more effort put into this process; H. Snell & Co. became Snell’s Territory Agencies and was formed into a limited liability company. Its clients included such businesses as Vacuum Oil, Guinea Airways, W.R. Carpenter & Co.’s motor-ship, \textit{Rafeaul}, Hardie’s Company Ltd., The London, Liverpool & Globe Insurance Ltd. and Vauxhall cars.\textsuperscript{52}

In this year also the Melbourne Centenary Air Race was held and Harold’s Vacuum Agency meant he had prior news of the arrival of planes so that, when not at school, his children witnessed the arrival of the competitors. The Race Committee had requested protection of the planes when they had landed. Although Snell’s contracting business continued, his growing agency company was managed separately, and it was later to be sold to Millars & Sandover of Western Australia.\textsuperscript{53}

When he had returned to Darwin in 1931, Harold had built three ‘cottages’ in Smith Street and the family had moved into one of them. They, especially the children, were saddened by realising that Nym had died during their absence. Ivy Mary found the lovely Carmen and the family settled down. By 1935 Ivy Mary had given birth to three more boys, Brian, John and Ron (the only child to have his name shortened). It was the fashion for such events to be recorded in the local press. This announcement added that it was Harold’s fourth son.

“They’re counting them now,” growled Ivy Mary. “This is the last!”

By the mid-1930s the Great Depression, as it has sometimes been called, was affecting more than the local scene. The changes would, eventually, affect both Darwin and H. Snell too.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Northern Standard}, 10.8.1934.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Northern Standard}, 1.5.1937, 14.5.1937.
CHAPTER FOUR

The Second Sino-Japanese War between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan had already broken out by 9 September 1937 and was to be a prolonged struggle to last until 1945. China had been the “sino central” power in Asia for over 2,000 years (with some less productive periods). The United States’ Commander Perry had forcibly opened Japan to Western trade in 1853; and this had led to Japan’s transition from a feudal into a modern industrial state while China had fallen into civil war with various war lords vying for supremacy. To further complicate matters, China had leased Port Arthur (a warm water port on the Pacific coast) to Russia. There would be a gradual progression of crises leading to World War II and this would have its effect on both Harold and, especially, on Darwin.

The military build-up began in Darwin in 1932. Point Emery (later Larrakeyah) and East Point were reserved for future military and naval purposes and two large houses at Parap were let to the Navy to house its men. It was announced that a garrison of forty soldiers would be established at Darwin as a nucleus in this ‘lonely wastes of the north.’ Twenty-four air force personnel were also mentioned. Barracks accommodation would be constructed and the Royal Australian Air Force would have two hangers and a fully equipped technical department. Aerodromes would be established at Katherine, Victoria River Downs, Wave Hill and Wyndham.

It sounded very efficient. In effect, however, the failure to improve Darwin’s basic infrastructure, lack of co-operation between the various Canberra government departments and the distance from and the isolation of Darwin itself would frustrate the efficient implementation of the program.

As Darwin was practically defenceless; anti-aircraft guns were to be set up to protect the proposed oil tanks and forty artillerymen (with their families) were sent up from “the south” and were to man the guns. Darwin’s “capacity as the chief airport of the north” was cited as

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55 *Advertiser*, (Adelaide) 1.7.1932.
56 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10.8.1932.
another reason for this defence. At this early stage of preparedness, the local union paper entitled these preparations to be of: “the comic opera brand”.

By the end of 1933 the Thursday Island defences had been transferred to Darwin although the accommodation for the soldiers had not been completed. The local paper reported that “The defences of the north were based on the “British Fleet Strategic Importance of the North”. Sir George Pearce, Minister of Defence, said that the Commonwealth’s establishment of a military garrison at Darwin had no connection with Japanese territorial ambitions in the islands north of Australia. The local paper, however, disagreed: “Australian workers will see the connection between these war preparations and the war now raging in China.”

Harold advertised in the local papers, and his first reaction to the Depression had been to use this means to attract work:

Buy that piece of land you were thinking about. See Mr. Snell for good things offering. Prices are now at bedrock. Now is the time to make a home for your-self.

From his subsequent activities, it would seem that he was to take his own advice. As explained, the half-acre blocks of land, resulting from Darwin’s first survey, allowed two business buildings to be erected on one half-acre block. It became his practice to purchase one block, build one building on it, sell or rent it, and from the proceeds build the second.

57 Northern Standard, 21.5.1932.
58 The Sydney Sun quoted in the Northern Standard, 22.2.1932.
59 Northern Standard, 3.11.1933.
60 Northern Standard, 9.2.1934.
62 Northern Standard, 12.7.1932.
63 Northern Territory Times and Gazette, 25.3.1932.
Thus he began to build a series of modern commercial buildings in Smith Street. Early in 1938 the *Northern Standard* wrote:

> It is to the credit of Mr. H. Snell that Smith Street has become the business centre of the town. It was his foresight and enterprise that erected Hansen’s Garage, the Star Picture Theatre, Brogan’s shop, O’Driscoll’s Hairdressing Saloon, Jessop’s shop, Young’s Garage and the Ice & Cold Storage building.  

That pattern was to continue until all vacant blocks but one in the present-day Mall, and beyond that too, had new, modern business premises on them. By that time Harold was busy with the current military work.

Of course this was not the only contracting work he did. There were the regular private contracts and the small-scale jobs. One fairly regular type of work was clearing or preparing runways on the various aerodromes of the Territory: Darwin, Katherine and Newcastle Waters. Again there was probably a reason. He was now well-equipped for this kind of work.

There were also larger-scale contracts, one of which was his purchase of the then redundant Don Picture Show on the corner of Cavanagh and Bennett Streets (the present site of the ABC studios.) He built the two-storey Don Hotel on this site. It would be sold to Mrs. Gordon of the Victoria Hotel.

Not everything was a success. One contract that had nearly cost him and his crew their lives also occurred in 1935. Early planes were not built as sturdily as modern aircraft and

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64 *Northern Standard*, 4.1.1938.
65 *Northern Standard*, 8.11.1935, 9.10.1936, 2.10.1936.,
66 *Northern Territory Times and Gazette*, 3.5.1932;
*Northern Standard*, 20.9.1932.
more concern was experienced for their safety. The Singapore-Darwin airline service existed by 1935 and the heavy monsoon rains in Darwin, it was believed, were a hazard. An emergency landing ground was to be built at Cape Fourcroy on barely-explored Bathurst Island. Harold won the contract. He hired a pearling boat, the *Maroubra*, to take him, his men, stores and a motor lorry to Bathurst Island. It began badly. There were very rough seas which gave an unpleasant beginning. But the real trouble began when they reached ‘dense undergrowth’ and then ‘treacherous swamps’ with ‘breast-high reeds’. They were forced to explore a route to the seacoast and then trudge back along the cliffs and the beach to the pearling boat, suffering some ‘hunger and thirst’ in the effort. Meanwhile an alarm for their survival had been raised, and the story was reported in newspapers throughout Australia.67

Not all the regular air services to Darwin were from overseas. On 16 February 1937 the inaugural service of Guinea Airways began between Adelaide and Darwin.68 In February, 1937 it commenced a weekly service between the two; and for a short time operated from Adelaide to Sydney. That route was abandoned when the Darwin service increased to three times a week. In 1938 Guinea Airways won the Royal Mail Darwin-Adelaide mail contract. Darwin’s growing importance as an airport would affect the development of the town.

Harold Snell continued to submit tenders for contracts, the main difference being that the political situation meant that there would be increasing military contracts. They, however, would still be interspersed with his efforts to beautify Smith Street, by then, the main business-street of Darwin, as well as to tender for other jobs.

The Snell family had a new problem. It was time for their eldest child to go to secondary school and there were none in the Northern Territory. The solution was to send her to a boarding school in Queensland. The only means to do this was to transport her there by boat, and this would mean waiting until the monthly boat arrived. It would take from a week to ten days for the trip as the boat would discharge and load cargo on the way. Also, the timetable for the boat did not coincide with the school’s curriculum and that would create further problems: what to do in the school vacations? Also the annual Christmas holiday back to Darwin could only be taken at the cost of arriving back at school late, not a good means of

68 *Northern Standard*, 16.2.1937.
learning new subjects! But this was the way of it at that time. It solved itself. Kind friends invited her to their homes for the major holidays, the school provided board for the short Easter breaks and once she had to stay with Matron’s family when the boat’s arrival was two weeks after school had finished.

By the end of 1932 Darwin was ‘the recognised air-port for North Australia’. It also witnessed the arrival of the small group of forty odd garrison men who were welcomed to Darwin in the Soldiers Memorial Hall. By August 1933 a future “patrolling of the northern coastline of Australia” was advertised, with its cost estimated at £100,000. When the news that a permanent garrison was to be established ‘in the near future’, the need for more engineers and artillery men was also published. But, future expectations were always announced well ahead of their realisation.

By 1934 it was again stated that the defence of the north was based on the British fleet’s understanding that Darwin was of strategic importance.

Harold was also concerned with the general welfare of the town and was willing to do something about it. By 1935 ‘the Mayor and the people who had signed the petition’ expressed the seriousness of the water position at Darwin: ‘Mr Snell, who was present, was the prime mover in arranging the meeting and he deserved great credit for it.’ He had had trouble with obtaining sufficient water for his contracts at times and the other perceived problem was that, if naval ships called into Darwin for oil supplies, they would also require water. The Mayor, Mr Brogan, remarked that, if the Garrison had not had the big storage tanks at the former Vestey’s Meatworks to draw on, their position would have been serious. The position at the Two-and-a-Half-Mile (Parap) was already serious.

By September the Government’s Civil and Military Engineers were to test the situation; and it was acknowledged that the founding of the Garrison accentuated the need for an adequate water supply. By June 1936 the scheme was referenced as ‘the proposed military water supply scheme’.

69 Northern Standard, 4.11.1932.
70 Northern Standard, 25.8.1933.
71 Northern Standard, 9.2.1934.
72 Northern Standard, 10.1.1935.
CHAPTER FIVE

Overseas, the attitude to the League of Nations and its Sanctions, which had helped to keep a fairly peaceful 1920s, was changing. Japan had invaded Manchuria. The Chinese Ambassador interviewed the British Foreign Secretary claiming that this Japanese military action in North China constituted a breach of the Nine Powers Treaty. The League intervened, taking twelve months to study the situation. When it took action, Japan resigned from the League. The United States of America had never joined it. The other members, faced with this crisis, did not stand steadfastly by it. The effects of the Depression were blamed for this deteriorating situation. It was also believed that Germany was prepared to tear the Treaty of Versailles to pieces and regain her position as the greatest military nation in Europe.\(^74\) Britain’s attitude was hardening and their warships sailed for Singapore.\(^75\) Australia began to rearm.\(^76\) Nevertheless, there were other situations where “mutual support in accordance with the League of Nations” still operated.\(^77\) Also ‘Britain was still firmly attached to collective security conditional on the system being powerful enough to deter any would be aggressor.’ Italy attacked Abyssinia: France, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece informed Britain that they would support her in the event of an Italian attack; thus reaffirming their obligations of mutual support in accordance with the League of Nations’ Covenant. France announced her intention to co-operate with the British Navy.\(^78\) The Franco-Soviet Pact, however, led to German resentment because she claimed to feel herself surrounded by its effect.\(^79\) According to League experts, ‘the amounts spent by the nations of the world on rearmaments …was little short of £1,400,000,000…compared with £500,000,000 in 1913.’ ‘Mr. Neville Chamberlain …called on Britain to arm quickly.’ He said: it is ‘the best way to aid peace.’\(^80\) A decision by the League Council could bind Australia ‘and might, though not necessarily, make the Commonwealth a participant, through her signatory to the Versailles

\(^{75}\) Northern Standard, 24.9.1935.
\(^{76}\) Northern Standard, 15.11.1935.
\(^{80}\) Northern Standard, 19.1.1937, 19.2.1937.
The Australian Government plans included obtaining additional fighter aircraft, increasing the Air Force personnel and other war preparations.  

After outlining a Northern Territory’s story of local failures, the union paper claimed the north ‘is cursed with a succession of southern Ministers who would rather let it lie empty than grant long-term leases, which would make long-term investment of capital possible.’ Ministers ‘were unable or unwilling to recognise that there must be able men on the spot with authority to act without referring everything to Canberra.’  

The 1920s had appeared to be peaceful and Compulsory Military Training was cancelled in Australia at the beginning of the 1930s. Despite the deteriorating conditions, it was not proposed to re-establish this, but authorities would introduce certain proposals which should improve the position of the military forces. The Commonwealth’s ‘voluntary enlistment recruiting scheme’ increased numbers in the militia forces. Again, the local newspaper appealed for better infrastructure: ‘cheap transport over decent roads’ and ‘batteries for R.A.N., R.A.A.F. and A.M.F. stations… [that] apart from their military necessity, would furnish opportunities for…useful local markets for settlers.’  

From 1936 to 1939 Darwin more than doubled its population, not unconnected with the build-up of the military forces and the need to service them. In 1936 the Australian Federal Budget surplus was £45,000. It was announced [in the House of Representatives] that ‘In any future extension of the Royal Australian Air Force the provision of a squadron at Darwin would receive first consideration.’  

In 1937 it was reported that “Production of the Commonwealth’s first Australian-made fighter planes will be commenced before the end of the year.” Australia’s Defence Programme included Australian construction of ‘one new naval vessel…and the modernising of…the Canberra and Australia…at a cost of £800,000.’ The £2,672,000 allocated to the Royal Australian Air Force in 1937 led to the purchase of new war planes, new buildings, improvement to aerodromes in addition to further recruiting of Air Force personnel.

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81 Northern Standard, 10.3.1936.
82 Northern Standard, 15.11.1935.
83 Northern Standard, 7.7.1936.
84 Northern Standard, 10.7.1936.
85 Northern Standard, 18.10.1936.
86 Northern Standard, 18.7.1936.
87 Northern Standard, 16.10.1936.
88 Northern Standard, 22.1.1937.
The British Government at the Imperial Conference had requested that the Empire ‘build up their own navies to a strength to enable them to guard their own ports, organise air forces of sufficient strength to enable them to repel attacks on their own territory, equip armies adequate to safeguard their own homes and leave a surplus to help the Mother country’. In return it was understood Britain would take more goods from the Empire, especially foodstuffs. \(^89\)

In 1939 the new Air Force Aerodrome was being constructed, 4 miles from Darwin, at a cost of £250,000. \(^90\)

The Darwin water supply scheme became an essential preliminary to any increase in the Garrison. In April 1938 the Commonwealth Government proposed to spend a very large sum on the development of Darwin as a Naval Base; also to station at Darwin two squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force. \(^91\)

The value of the Territory to the rest of Australia, from a strategical point of view, was more evident by 1938; and it was also clearer that its importance as an airmail junction was more generally appreciated. \(^92\) Overall, by the end of 1938, Australia had quadrupled her expenditure on defence from the position three years earlier. \(^93\) There was, however, still the problem of finding the money for the development of the Northern Territory’s infrastructure. One example of this was the power supply (already discussed). It was not until after World War II that the residents of Darwin ‘would enjoy the benefits of lighting, fans and refrigeration.’ \(^94\) The new style of tropical houses had improved with the invention of fibro-cement louvres. These louvres enabled houses to be more conventionally built with areas of louvres on the outer walls that could be opened during fine weather but firmly locked when rain fell.

Of more immediate concern at the time, however, was the ‘unsatisfactory progress of defence construction at Darwin,’ \(^95\) caused both by the frequency and length of industrial

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\(^89\) Northern Standard, 88 9.2.1937.
\(^90\) Northern Standard, 14.7.1939.
\(^91\) Northern Standard, 15.4.1938.
\(^92\) Northern Standard, 30.8.1938.
\(^93\) Northern Standard, 8.11.1938.
\(^94\) B. Phelts, ‘Switching On: Darwin’s History of Electricity Supply.’ A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Northern Territory University, 1997.
\(^95\) Northern Standard, 15. 3.1939.
disputes; one in 1939 lasting over a month.\textsuperscript{96} In addition, there was the difficulty contractors experienced in obtaining accommodation for their workmen.\textsuperscript{97} In this Harold Snell had been more forward thinking. Believing, as he did, that settled married men were best for him and for the Northern Territory, he had built cottages for some of his more reliable men.

In October 1938 an increase of £197,000 over the previous year’s expenditure would bring the Northern Territory defence expenditure to £300,000 to cover the cost of the new water supply, a new hospital and other military necessities.

The most pressing problem was the ineffectiveness of such infrastructure as the wharf that held up supplies that had been sent up from the south:\textsuperscript{98} ‘there [was] room at the wharf for only two ships to berth at one time…and there was no shed accommodation on the wharf and no space there in which to dump cargo and let the ship get away…a truck when loaded [had] to be pushed by man power along a railway line to the angle of the “L” on to a turntable and then to be taken along the wharf again to a shed…’\textsuperscript{99}.

In October 1938 the Australian military authorities stated…that ‘plans have been completed for the most complete and realistic naval, military and air force exercises ever held in Australia.’\textsuperscript{100}

There was to be the creation of a new mobile force of 245 men for Darwin. Recruiting would begin immediately and preliminary training given to them before they proceeded to Darwin.

By September 1939 the road out to the East Point, an area that had been reserved for military purposes, was closed to the public.\textsuperscript{101} ‘… Royal Australian Air Force planes [were] still parked out in the open on the Ross Smith airport awaiting the completion of a temporary hanger.’\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{96} Northern Standard, 15.8.1939.
\textsuperscript{97} Northern Standard.
\textsuperscript{98} Sydney Morning Herald, 11.8.1939; Northern Standard, 15.8.1939.
\textsuperscript{99} Northern Standard, 11.8.1939.
\textsuperscript{100} Northern Standard, 7.10.1938.
\textsuperscript{101} Northern Standard, 1.9.1939.
\textsuperscript{102} Herald, 11.8.1939; Northern Standard, 15.8.1939.

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In Britain the aerial rearmament programme was costing £52,000,000 including constructing such planes as ‘Rolls Royce...fighters, Hawker Hurricanes, Fairey battle bombers’ and other first line categories. There were new Government factories built in the west of the country. Over twenty-five British warships began combined fleet, fortress and air exercises in Singapore. In Australia State Military boundaries were abolished and Defences were then based on ‘the British system.’

Two hundred members of the Mobile Force arrived in Darwin. With the more imminent danger of war, military exercises had taken place with search lights sweeping the entrance to the harbour and the 4/6-inch guns (from Thursday Island) concentrating on that position. The oil tanks were defended and, under the plateau area of the town, underground excavations provided emergency storage areas. The long-promised patrolling of the coastline was in operation. Women there were to be encouraged to learn first aid, home nursing and other war-time jobs. The latter did not remain a policy for long because the women and children were soon evacuated from the town.

The start of the war in Europe is generally held to be 1 September 1939, but action, with all its horrors, did not affect Darwin until 19 February 1942 when the Japanese fleet, under the commander who had conducted the raid on Pearl Harbour, bombed Darwin harbour. They sank eight out of a total of 65 Allied warships and merchant vessels that were in the Darwin harbour at the time of the raid. Most of these ships were anchored near each other, making them an easy target for air attack. Darwin was attacked by aircraft flying from carriers and land bases in the Dutch East Indies. All four carriers that had participated in the Pearl Harbour attack at the start of the Pacific War were also in use. In addition to these carrier-based aircraft, 54 land-based bombers attacked Darwin in a high-level bombing raid nearly two hours after the earlier 10 am attack. These planes comprised 27 Nell bombers flying from Ambon and another 27 Betty bombers from the Celebes.

The anticipated event of a force of ships steaming into the Darwin harbour, to be met by a salvo of fire from the 6 inch guns trained on this entrance, had not occurred. It is a well-known belief that the next war will be fought in the same way as the previous one, but, of course, it never is. Similar defensive measures at Singapore were bypassed by the Japanese simply attacking there from a different direction.

103 Northern Standard, 14.3.1939.
104 Northern Standard, 10.3.1939.
The Japanese raiders who attacked Darwin on 19 February 1942 arrived there at 9:58 am. They attacked shipping in the harbour sinking the USS Peary, HMAS Mavie, USAT Meigs, MV Neptuna, (at the jetty), Zealandia, SS Mauna Loa, MV British Motorist, and the coal storage hulk Kelat. At least 21 people on the wharf were killed.\footnote{https//en.wikipedia.org/wiki/bombing_of_Darwin.}

In addition to the raid on the harbour, other Japanese naval aircraft bombed the R.A.A.F. base and civil airfield in Darwin as well as the town's army barracks. All were seriously damaged. The second wave of 27 land-based bombers arrived over the town just before midday when the Japanese force attacked the Air Force Base.\footnote{Remember it had only been built in 1939.} Due to defective fuses, the Australian heavy anti-aircraft gunners were unable to damage these high-flying Japanese aircraft. The air raids caused chaos in Darwin, with most essential services including water and electricity being badly damaged. Rumors of an imminent invasion spread and some of the town's civilian and the Air Force population fled inland.

According to official figures, 278 R.A.A.F. servicemen were considered to have deserted as a result of the raids, although it has been argued that these "desertions" were mostly the result of ambiguous orders given to R.A.A.F. ground staff after the attacks. The local R.A.A.F. wing commander gave a verbal order that all airmen were to move half a mile down the main road and then half a mile inland. At this vague point arrangements would be made to feed them. The order led to utter chaos. In its final form it was interpreted as an order for immediate and general evacuation of the area. Highly exaggerated rumors of an impending Japanese invasion had already reached the base from the town and spread quickly. Men gathered their belongings and abandoned their stations.

In March 1942 the Lowe Commission, which investigated the number of people killed during the 19 February raids, estimated 243 victims but, assuming a few were unidentified, concluded: "I am satisfied that the number is approximately 250 and I doubt whether any further investigation will result in ascertaining it more precisely."

Harold was in Brisbane at the time of the air attacks, attempting to have the materials for his contracts improved and increased. He immediately flew back to Darwin. With five children either at the secondary or tertiary level and the state of education as it was in the Territory, Ivy Mary and family now lived in Brisbane. As Harold did not return to Brisbane until the early months of 1943, it is assumed that he returned to Darwin to complete his
contracts and had also assisted the military authorities in Darwin during this period. Throughout the time he was in Darwin there were regular air raids, 64 in all. For the rest of the war he was a works supervisor in the Engineering (Civil) Section of the Works and Services Branch of the Allied Works Council.

This was the background Harold Snell and Darwin faced between 1935 and 1942.
CHAPTER SIX

This is the story of Harold Snell and Darwin so the eventually hard-won success of the Allies in World War II is not part of this story. The effects of this war on Darwin are part of it.

The pressure of war and lack of finances meant that neither the Haslam (emphasis on the military aspect) nor the McInnis (emphasis on the civilian aspects) reports for Darwin’s future were put into effect. In 1943 the Commonwealth called for a third report by H J Manning (property valuer), and L A. Bullen (architect) entitled ‘Darwin Replanned: A Future Tropical Garden City’ that recommended the compulsory acquisition of all land within Darwin and its environs to enable the complete redevelopment of the city. This recommendation would soon have a significant impact on Darwin’s civilian population.

By this time it was clear that the Commonwealth favoured the Symons’ Committee recommendation of compulsory acquisition of Darwin properties. On 30 November 1943, Joseph Carrodus, Secretary of the Department of the Interior, wrote to Administrator Abbot informing him that the Government’s intention was to abolish freehold land tenure in Darwin.

The Commonwealth continued with its plans for Darwin’s development. It opted for an increased military role in the heart of the town, and proceeded with plans to compulsorily acquire and redevelop all freehold land within a radius of 10 miles. This in turn led to the Darwin Lands Acquisition Act 1945. With the passage of the Act on 17 January 1946, the Commonwealth became the owner of all privately owned lands in Darwin and its suburbs. Their intention was that the land would be incorporated within a system of leasehold tenure. The stated ‘ultimate intention’ was that much of Darwin would be rebuilt along the lines of a garden city, similar to Canberra. An earlier Cabinet submission had noted that ‘the erection of temporary shacks and make-shift buildings will not be permitted’.

In both of his reports McInnis had recommended the creation of a town management board which would advise the Administrator on matters relating to the control, management, government, and welfare of Darwin: a limitation that was not dissimilar to that which had already hindered pre-war Darwin’s defence build-up. On 18 July 1946 Joseph Carrodus sent a memo to the Administration in Darwin advising that the recommendation would be adopted. In order to prevent the re-emergence of old Chinatown, Carrodus noted that it was undesirable that persons of one nationality (non-Europeans) be allowed to congregate in a particular area: a return of racism to the Territory again. The Town Management Board was
created via the *Darwin Town Management Ordinance 1947*. It comprised a chairman and three other members and held its first meeting on 14 August 1947.

Despite the good intentions there were delays and conflicts among government agencies, which in turn caused frustration among Darwin residents who were returning to the town after the war and wanted to rebuild their homes, but were unable to obtain security of tenure on their land. Many residents sought compensation for their losses.

The Labor Government was in power in 1945 when the war came to an end. It agreed that Darwin had been so badly destroyed that a new tropical ‘Canberra-style’ town would replace it. The Coalition Government won power in 1949 and countermanded the plan.

It was against this changed and changing background that Harold returned to the Territory with his partners, Jim Cousin and Sid Mazlin. Although Ivy Mary was still a partner, she remained in Brisbane with the responsibility of having their five children educated and prepared for their future careers. It was Harold’s stated intention to join her and to submit tenders for the firm’s building contracts, order the necessary materials and visit the Territory regularly to supervise affairs. He did not plan to build a Darwin home for himself and family again. The plan of the Maranga/Winnellie site proves this. Two, not three, partner buildings, were to be built.

The partners’ first move was to attend the war surplus materials sales up there, buying up large quantities of vehicles, building materials and machinery. These surplus war material sales were Australia-wide; but one of the firm’s purchases demonstrated one Territory characteristic: when a box of hammers was opened there were the steel heads in perfect condition, but the handles were merely an outline with the wood eaten out by white-ants.

It was probably in response to the above federal government acts or rumours of these acts that made the three partners attempt to purchase land that had been the war-time R.A.A.F. car park, a block of land outside the original limits of pre-war Darwin. However, it was not outside the limitations of the new legislation.

In April 1947 the firm advised the Northern Territory Administration of the purchase of ‘all buildings and fencing etc. on the location described as R.A.A.F. Vehicle Park, Darwin.’ It also requested an official lease of the area on which they stood, but it did not receive any satisfactory response.

Three new companies had been built around the core company, Snell’s Contracting Company. They were Darwin Milling and Trading Ltd., Buildings Removals Ltd., and Pipes and Denaro Blocks Ltd.
With ownership of the buildings on their preferred block, the large purchases made at the War Surplus Sales and a vaguely worrying Commonwealth control, the partners decided to move ahead.

In April 1947 Snell’s Contracting Company advised the Northern Territory Administration that they had completed the purchase of ‘all buildings and fencing etc. on the location described as R.A.A.F. Vehicle Park, Darwin,’ which formed part of Section 2, Hundred of Bagot. Admitting the lack of ‘any suggestion of tenure,’ they applied for ‘the longest possible lease at present available’.

On the Twenty-first of November 1949 further correspondence from the Northern Territory Administrator, A.R. Driver, to the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, Canberra, revealed that Snell’s Contracting Company were the lessees of 27 acres being part of Section 2 Hundred of Bagot and outlined the story of their acquisition of this area, their application for a lease as well as their application for further extension of the area leased. It explained that a lease for five years had been granted under the Darwin Short Term Leases Ordinance. It also outlined the present situation of the company:

Since 1947, a compact and well-designed settlement has been built which at this stage contains 33 buildings, complete with sewerage and water reticulation. The settlement contains residences for the principals and workmen and in addition there are single men’s quarters with recreation rooms and a kindergarten for the employees’ children.107

A list was included, showing the values for insurance purposes amounted to £2,350. Market value was considered to be ‘not under £40,000’. Machinery, plant and stock were valued, ‘for insurance purposes at £8,500.’ The Company was stated to be the only major Contracting Company in the Northern Territory:

There is a complete sawmilling outfit, joinery, concrete brick plant and concrete pipe making plant, and in addition, the Company is equipped to undertake the bulk removal of buildings.108

As the existing lease expired on 30th June, 1952, the Company was seeking a long lease ‘as it naturally wished to obtain security of tenure when considering such large assets. In view of the initiative taken by the Company and the large expenditure incurred I recommend that the

107 Letter to ‘Secretary, Department of the Interior, Canberra, ACT : re application for 99 year lease.
108 Letter to ‘Secretary, Department of the Interior, Canberra, ACT : re application for 99 year lease.
Minister’s approval be obtained for the grant of a lease for 99 years under Section 71 of the Darwin Town Area Leases Ordinance 1947, for business and residence purposes.’
Before I continue with the sad ending of Harold Snell’s fairly short life, I think you, the reader, will already know his character. He was clever enough to conceive of large schemes and was venturesome enough to take risks to achieve his ends. This was another difference between him and Ivy Mary. She would have been quite content with a regular, reasonably medium income. He was more ambitious and yet continued to live by his high principles.

These principles can be illustrated by his interest in both the Masonic Lodge (favoured at the time by the more elite members of the area) and also in socialism (favoured by the working classes in general) the common thread, in his opinion, was that they both sought to help others. Historians, Peter and Sheila Forrest, recollect a somewhat negative contemporary description of him as a ‘capitalistic communist’. I was about to pass over this, but deeper thought made me realise that it really was another description of his character: he was able to sympathise with a wider range of humanity.

He now had his village covering two aspects of his ambition. There were facilities there to cover every angle of building activity: from a sawmill to cut a tree into timber, space to allow this timber to season, to the planing and cabinet making workshop, to a retail store to
sell building material, to a cement ‘factory’ where washtubs were built and where he was experimenting with cement pipes (to be ready when sewerage was introduced to the Territory) to his construction work to build ‘whatever’ and to the ability to move this to ‘wherever’. There was also a mechanics workshop leased out, but where the firm’s needs had priority.

The other aspect was that the buildings in the village were designed to house his partners and his workmen. They were built with the occupants’ everyday needs attended to, including water reticulation, sewerage and telephones: services not found generally in Darwin homes at that time.

But, what was he like as ‘the man who lives next door’? Well, he would have had a drink with you after work; and would have believed that his luck included that he did not lose his ability to think clearly as quickly as many other men did: a clear advantage to a business man. He was an inveterate pipe smoker; and it was here that his good luck ended.

There was one machine in the joinery workshop that seemed to respond to his attention better than to the attention of others. While repairing it, pipe in mouth, as usual, he spoke to his workmate out of the other side of his mouth and the pipe fell. Automatically his hand dropped down to rescue it and he lost his thumb.

It was a particularly happy family Christmas they had in Brisbane that year, but it was to be his last. He died in Brisbane on 16 April 1949. He was 57 years of age. His daughter was on her way to England to renew her acquaintance with the English branch of the family. Receiving a letter from her mother, she had rung home and was told that her father had had a heart attack that morning and that Ivy Mary was waiting for the ambulance. Harold struggled out of bed to tell her not to give up her trip.

Luck was with her. Although it was Maundy Thursday, she managed to get a flight back to Sydney overnight and, by running from one plane to the other, caught the connection to Brisbane to be with her mother at this tragic time.

Nevertheless, what he had built up did not end with his rather short life. The family sold their interest in the various firms and this gave Ivy Mary a secure middle income for the rest of her life.
When the federal government permitted it (and, governed from afar, Territory people were always limited in their activities by federal government edicts of some kind) the Darwin Milling and Trading Company moved to town.

The core company, Snell’s Contracting Company, retained its name and function. The village, Maranga, continued its form and service for a time, but became the Darwin suburb of Winnellie and was divided into individual leases in 1964. Ninety-nine year leases were finally granted to the Northern Territory populace in 1950.

The ability to move buildings en masse was not completely wasted either. Before Harold died, Snell’s Contracting Company had received a contract to build a meatworks for Bovril in Katherine. As so often happened, a change of government or other intervention meant a change of plan. Bovril reneged on completing this contract. Nevertheless, it employed the Company to move all the houses from a former wartime aerodrome base to be relocated in Katherine.
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