The Condamine Bell

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In the early pioneering days of the last century when vast areas of land were unfenced, the bullock team was the only means of heavy transport to the newly settled areas.

Bullock bells were therefore a necessity in those times to enable the teamster to find his team after they had strayed from camp or homestead after having been unyoked overnight. The greater the carrying sound of the bell, the better it was.

The most successful and popular bell was first made in Condamine by a Mr. S. W. Jones, who had a blacksmith shop there in the late sixties and seventies. The “Bullfrog” or “Jones” bell as it was first known, became famous under its better known title of “Condamine” bell.

GREAT CARRYING POWER

The sound of this bell had great carrying power, claims that it had been heard six and even seven miles distant being common in those days.

The first bells were made out of pit saw or cross-cut blades riveted and brazed, and fashioned in the semi-peg-topped shape, instead of the normal bell-shape which flares outward at the rim.

The true Jones bell was stamped on the tongue, and these bells today are greatly prized relics of an era which can never come again. The bells became so well known that orders for them came from as far afield as Western Australia.

While Mr. Jones was in Condamine he taught a Mr. Christie Andersen the method of making these bells, and Mr. Andersen also became famous as a maker of Condamine bells. His bell was also stamped.

The true Andersen and Jones bells are few to find now, and the authenticity of an original is of course doubtful if it does not have the tongue intact and stamped with either of the makers’ names.

PIONEERS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Samuel William Jones was born in the village of Pontybat in Breckonshire, Wales, in 1838. He arrived in Queensland in the sailing ship “Wanatta” on 30 April 1862. He was a wheelwright by trade.
He first of all went to Toowoomba, thence to Dalby, where he married a Miss Emily Amos in 1867. He went to Condamine in 1867, and their only child, a daughter, was born there in 1868. He carried on the trade of blacksmith.

When Condamine began to decline after the railway had by-passed the township, the Jones family moved to Toowong in Brisbane, about 1879 or 1880. He continued to make the bells at Toowong for many years, and had several assistants, the last of whom being a Mr. Alf Ormond. Mr. Ormond succeeded Mr. Jones in 1912, and still makes the bells. Mr. Ormond, now in his late seventies, advises he has taught his son the secret of making the bells.

Mr. Jones died in April 1927 at the age of 88 years, his wife having died in 1922.

While in Condamine he was assisted by Mr. Christie Andersen, and a Mr. Tom Beckett.

Mr. Andersen was born in Odense, Denmark, on 3 January 1851. In 1871, at the age of 20, he came by sailing ship to Queensland, with his father, mother, three brothers and three sisters. His father (Peter Andersen), who lived until he was 92, first settled at Zillmere (then known as Zilmairs Water-hole). Mr. Andersen was originally a nailmaker by trade. He was married in 1877.

SAWMILLER AND BLACKSMITH

Mr. Andersen moved from Condamine to Miles, and had a sawmill on the Wallan in 1896. Mr. Andersen resided in the district for 42 years before leaving to settle in Beaufort Street, Alderley, Brisbane, in 1919.

In the Miles District he was a sawmiller and carpenter as well as a blacksmith. He had a sawmill at Paddy's Creek, later moved to Wallan Creek where "Christianberg" was the name of his property.

His blacksmith shop in Miles was located somewhere to the rear of where the Miles Ambulance Centre now stands.

Mr. Andersen died in 1937 at the age of 86. His wife died in 1925.

He continued to make bells in Brisbane until a year or two before his death. His son Fred helped him and carried on after his death, until he was forced to stop doing so because of the shortage of the right materials.

A Mr. McLennan recalls that his father, who had a property at Kenmore, used to supply charcoal for the forge of Mr. Jones, when the latter was living in Brisbane.

Mr. Jones attached great importance to the quality of the charcoal which was the only fuel used in the process. He would not use charcoal which was burned in a pit, this being
the normal method of producing it. Charcoal from ironbark was of no use as it threw too many sparks, and charcoal from spotted gum was also barred.

This meant that the logs of timber accepted by Mr. Jones, of which grey gum was one, had to be snigged to the bank of a little creek on Mr. McLennan’s property, stacked in the open for burning and then at a certain stage water was carried from the creek to quench the flames, and after the rough cooling the charcoal was bagged and delivered to Mr. Jones.