

What brought YOU to Wootton?

Geoff Freeman and Julie Williams



This is the first in what we hope will be a regular item where we interview local residents and find out what brought them to Wootton, when, what Wootton was like at the time they arrived and so on. Our lucky first effort goes to Geoff and Julie from Avondale on Wootton Way.

Geoff started looking for a property around 15 years ago when he needed to get out of the oil refining business and wanted to return to his farming roots. (He owned a dairy farm in Nana Glen.) As for most of us newcomers he gave himself a 200 km radius of Sydney in which to find somewhere and just happened to drive through Wootton on numerous occasions. Every time he passed through he saw this property was for sale and it kept calling to him. So, one day he stopped and talked with the owner, the vegetation was mainly whiskey grass and bracken that came over the roof of his vehicle and he had no idea what size the property was! Geoff thought no more about it until sometime later when Julie asked him if he was going to buy the property and lo and behold the dream became a reality!

So Geoff and Julie have been Woottonites since around 1997. The original Wootton Hall had already been demolished and the Wootton Way was still the Pacific Highway with traffic thundering past their door day and night!

They hadn't realized how run down both the property and the house were but over the years have painstakingly brought them back, not without making city slicker mistakes and some terrifying experiences of course. For example, they decided to burn the river flats area with the whiskey grass and bracken. The captain of the local fire brigade at the time would not agree to burn the area due to the conditions; however, Geoff ploughed ahead undeterred. A ball of flame rolled across the paddock and Geoff and Julie watched in horror as they thought it would engulf Jack Squires' bailed hay on the neighbouring property. Lucky for them the flames got to the river and ran out of steam! At least one disaster averted, more luck than good management!

Both can remember clearly when the highway bypass opened. They went on a bus tour of the bypass where they were informed of all the environmental care that was taken with animal underpasses etc, followed by a bar-b-q at Coolongolook. There was a vintage car parade that just started when the heavens opened. I bet we can all imagine what that was like! The night the highway was opened for the first time was a shock for everyone. Wootton Way was so quiet no-one could sleep a wink and for at least a fortnight all the dogs kept barking at each other because they finally realized they weren't the only dogs in town!

Up until recently Julie commuted to Sydney on a weekly basis, leaving very early Tuesday morning and returning Friday morning. She recalls some horrendous drives in those early days with accidents closing the road (she recalls one trip of 7 hours!) dead animals along the roadside and trees down. As a fellow commuter for four years I take my hat off to her for maintaining it for so long! She is now enjoying her retirement living at Avondale full time with only the occasional trips to Sydney and both are continuing to enjoy their Wootton lifestyle.

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