



★ SERENITY is the keynote of Bill Roberts' "viewing room." For 30 years he has been Cobden's only undertaker.

★ HORSE owners in southern Victoria travel more than 50 miles (80 km) to the quiet township of Cobden (population 1300) where smithy Bill Roberts does a constant trade in shoeing their mounts.

Bill, 66, was born and grew up in Cobden, like his mother, who was one of the town's pioneers.

He learned his trade in the Depression years and has been a coachbuilder and farrier for 50 years.

Today he believes he is the only one in the business between Geelong and Portland, but when he has seen his two apprentices through their time he will think of retiring.

Although it's a dying trade, in the sense that there aren't many tradesmen now presiding over a forge, there's still plenty of work on hand, and Bill shoes around 50 horses a week.

In recent years, with a revival of interest in restoring old wagnettes as vintage pieces, Bill's coach-building craft has come back into its own.

In the workshop right now he has about 30 wagon wheels needing new steel tyres to be fitted.

Webb's coachbuilders, where Bill learned the trade and subsequently took over the business, used to shoe bullocks as well as horses, but that was before his time.

★ RIGHT: Craftsmen at work — the master Bill Roberts assisted by apprentice Anthony Ryan turns red hot metal into a horseshoe.

★ In a small country town it pays to be versatile in business, and that's why old Bill doubles up as the local blacksmith and undertaker

The shoe man of Cobden...

By LAURIE LANDRAY
Color: KEN STEPNEILL

Bill told POST he will shortly be shoeing his first bullock hoof — a curio piece mounted as a decoration.

When he took over Webb's in the 1940s and moved the blacksmith shop two blocks down Curdie St., Bill also became the town's only undertaker.

His handicraft does not extend to the carpentry for the coffins which, mostly made from imported meranti, are brought in from Melbourne to his "viewing room" where he has made arrangements for most of Cobden's older residents — his lifetime friends and neighbors — to be laid to rest.

His work is so varied that Bill says with conviction that after 50 years "I never tire of the job."

After the coke fire in the forge is put out for the day he takes his ease as craftsmen have done for centuries — with a game of bowls, using the same sure eye that turns a piece of steel into a horse-shoe to send his bowl down the green with just the right bias.



DOWN...

d his popularity hat-trick as e-time DJ in the 3-6 o'clock low in the more physically de- rly morning show he has a de- d of opposition (not "competi- ya, because they attract differ- ces) such as Don Lane, who ver 40s. eg inevitably grows out of the cord business he sees himself , more sophisticated berth and duate to TV. dy stretched his wings in that ompering ABC-TV's "Count- writing and presenting a spe- t for the 6-10 network.