

## **OPENING OF THE SHOREHAM RURAL FIRE STATION – 20-12-2014**

### **CHRISTY JOHNSTONE**

At this time we are going to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution to our community and to the folklore of the Shoreham Rural Fire Brigade of nonagenarian Christopher Johnstone. Christy is well known throughout the district and he is a respected elder of the community.

Christy's introduction to firefighting came as a youngster, probably about 12 years old, helping his mother carry tea and scones to the firefighters. Children then learnt through living.

Ironically, Christy has probably started more fires than he has extinguished. I have had the pleasure of helping Christy with one of his fires on the Crooks property. Christy was careful to point out that he didn't attend too many meetings, just the fires. Ever the practical man.

#### **Hedge fire**

One of Christy's burn offs got into a cypress hedge. He whipped down to the fire station to get the tanker but couldn't get in. So he just hoped that the fire went out and it did.

#### **Oats fire**

To get a tractor to plough a paddock you have to put diesel in it. In those days ploughing was done by horse. A horse can't work on grass. It needs fuel and that fuel is oats. Farmers would have 5 acres or so of oats for this purpose. One year the Johnstone oats crop was wrecked by caterpillars. They were eating the plants but the seeds were falling onto the ground. Christy had the onerous job of ploughing the crop in – by horse. It was proving impossible. Da Tuck suggested they burn the crop discreetly – in the middle of the night. It was windy but Da reckoned that would get the job done all the quicker. Christy ploughed a fire break around the crop. It burnt well, so well you could read a newspaper by the light. The fire crew was slow to respond. There was smoke everywhere but they couldn't find a fire and gave up the hunt. Next day the black patch bore stark testament to what had happened. Nothing was said, but needless to say, Da and Christy kept their heads down and didn't go into town for a few days. This story has a happy ending. Soon after it rained, the seed germinated and they had a great crop of oats.

Christy stands in the middle of our time. But he can take a child's hand and tell then a story which might reach forward to 2100 if they live as long as he has. His grandmother has taken his hand and told him stories in which she was a participant, which connect him, and through him, all of us with 1851 and the very beginnings of this community. This is an amazing span of connection for a man who can only be described as a living treasure of our community.

The gift Christy bestows upon us, through his stories and his insight into the past, is the ability for all of us to understand the importance of community and the parts we have to play in its many acts.

On behalf of the Shoreham Rural Fire Brigade, I have the honour of presenting Christy with Life Membership of the brigade.