

## HOBBS STORE

Walter Curry Allen, son of George Montgomery Allen and Rebecca Curry of South Wolumla, traded in the building known as the Commercial Arcade, Colombo, from 1889 until 1912. His brothers helped him with the construction and his general store was filled to capacity with goods of every description. The Allen family lived under the store in an area later used as a storeroom.

Walter Allen participated in many local activities, including the School of Arts and the establishment of the Bemboka school on its present site. Life was not always easy for families in the late nineteenth century and the Allen family were to bury three small children in the Bemboka cemetery during their time in the store.

The store was leased to Michael Wall and his wife, Emily (sister of J J Green), from 1912 to 1919. They too stocked a wide variety of goods including drapery, groceries, boots and shoes. Michael was recorded as the Secretary of the Agricultural, Horticultural and Dairy Farmers Association in 1916.

L R Hurrell took the lease of the store over for one year from 1919 until 1920. Mr Hurrell's stock included ironmongery, patent medicines, crockery, glassware, drapery, boots and groceries.



Walter Curry Allen and Alex in front of the general store built by Walter and his brother in 1889. Also pictured, the O'Neill sisters, dressmakers.



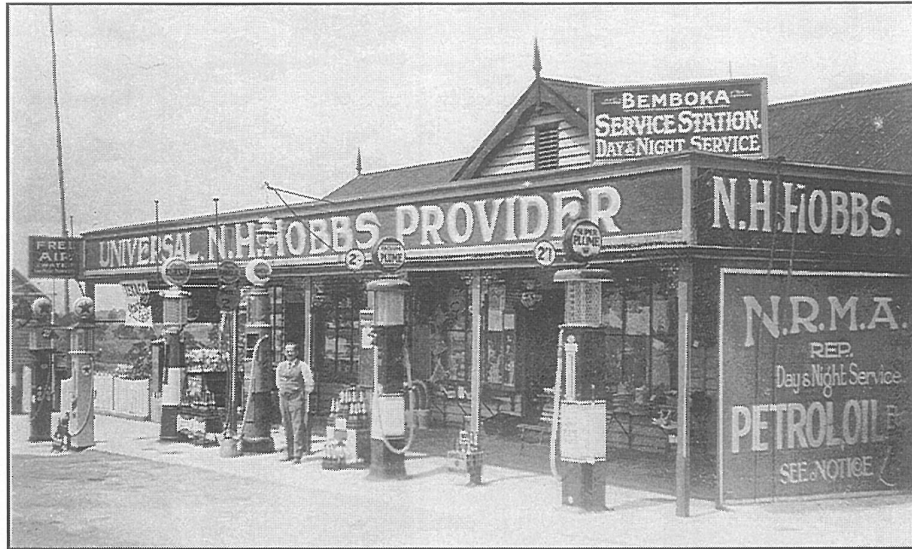
Lance Redgrave and Nicholas Hobbs, lessees of Walter Curry Allen's store, 1920-1923, pictured with Eric McCracken's solid-tyred delivery truck.

In 1920, N H Hobbs and Lance Redgrave met in the Randwick Repatriation Hospital. They were on final leave from World War I and approached the warehouses in Sydney to enquire about country stores. They were given a list of towns including Urunga and Bemboka. In March 1920, on his final day of furlough, which entitled him to free first-class travel, N H Hobbs booked his trunk on the train and took the journey from his home town of Gosford to Nimmitabel and then on to Bemboka. He and Lance Redgrave leased the Commercial Stores from Walter Allen.

This time marked the beginning of transport changes in the area. In 1920 the store had no petrol pumps. A year later N H Hobbs purchased a 1921 Model T Ford - the third car in Bemboka. (Jack Guthrie and Jonas Alcock already owned cars.) By the late 1920s there would be eight pumps lined along the front of the building advertising Texico, Atlantic, Plume, Shell and Voco brands in both super and standard varieties.

Prior to the installation of pumps, petrol was purchased in four-gallon drums and poured into the cars. When the pumps were installed, these were operated by hand for over 20 years until the coming of electricity in the early 1940s.

As the demand for petrol increased, so did the size of the drums. Heavy steel 44-gallon drums were shipped to the port of Tathra, rolled off the boats and loaded on to the waiting transport. Upon arrival at Bemboka they would be



Nicholas Hobbs, proprietor of the general store. Eight petrol bowsers were installed in the 1920s.

rolled on to a wooden cradle and decanted, one by one, into the 500-gallon underground tanks.

Another new line promoted by Hobbs and Redgrave was the three-piece Whitmont suit. Prior to the war, Nicholas Hobbs had taught from 1903 to 1910. He left teaching to assist his father as a tailor and mercer in Gosford. Equipped with this tailoring experience, the new storekeepers were able to accurately measure customers for Whitmont suits. The suits were then cut out, tacked and seamed together in Sydney and returned by ship via the Tathra port to Hobbs and Redgrave.

The customer would be called in for a final fitting and adjustments would be chalked on to the suit. The suit would be returned to Sydney with a covering letter explaining the alterations. The whole process took several weeks.

Farm machinery was also stocked on consignment basis. Problems with transport were frequent and the customer experienced long delays. The lorry service was one way of getting large items to and from the port. If the lorry broke down, teams could be used, but they were a costly addition to the price of the item. Rough seas could also delay the ships coming from Sydney.

In 1923, N H Hobbs married a local girl, Lucy Carpenter, and Lance Redgrave sought another business at Marrar. N H Hobbs continued to build up his variety of stock. Sales of motor bikes were recorded in the late 1920s. These bikes

**PLUME** for Easy Starting  
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Buy Your Petrol  
From Our Plume Pump  
We can supply  
All your motoring needs

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COMMERCIAL STORES  
BEMBOKA

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BEAUTY!

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AND  
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**Kodak Supplies**

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**LAUREL KEROSENE**

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Slight"

Is ODORLESS  
& DOES NOT  
CHAR THE WICK!

WE STOCK  
**"LAUREL"**

It's EQUALLY  
GOOD FOR  
HEATING,  
COOKING & INCUBATING!

N.H. HOBBS  
COMMERCIAL STORES  
BEMBOKA

Advertisements shown at picture screenings in the School of Arts during the 1920s.

were purchased on terms through Bennett and Woods. In 1928 Jack Delves (builder) purchased a BSA bike (affectionately called the 'Bastard Stops Anywhere') for £79/5/6. He paid £22 deposit and then £4 per month. As the local storekeeper, Nick was involved in many community projects. The *Bega District News* records that when Mr Hobbs first expressed his view at a show meeting, Mr J J Green told him to sit down as he was only a newcomer. (He had been in Bemboka for eight years.)

Buying products at competitive prices was another challenge faced by the storekeeper. During the 1930s a petrol price war developed and Mr Hobbs was advised by telegram: NOW IS THE TIME TO BUY, so he purchased 100 x 44-gallon drums of petrol from the Atlantic Petrol Company, which was shipped to the Tathra port. A short time later, the local inflammable liquid inspector (the policeman) was asked to check on the licensed storage area. Of course he found this to be inadequate. He sympathised with the position and said, *'We'll beat them, Nick. You own that paddock down the back so we'll draw up a set of plans for a shed down there to cover the quantity of fuel.'* This was done and licensed on paper. A year later when the licence was due for renewal it was thought prudent to have the fictitious shed demolished.

During the 1930s any profit was invested in further stock. Records of the 1934 suppliers included Arnotts (biscuits), Dalton Bros (sugar and groceries), Kandos Cement Co, S Hoffnung & Co (wire, galvanised iron), A E Matthews (boots), Williams & Hill (shoes), Brash Macarthur (linoleum), Gibson & Co (tea), Merimbula Bacon, Cable Frock Co, Shell Co, Sanitarium Health Foods, Edwards, Dunlop & Co (stationery), James Hardie & Co (fibrolite), Nestles Milk Co, Chapmans, Bonds, Berlei Ltd, Fowlers Vacola, Yates & Co, Texas Co (petrol). Many of these companies have passed the test of time and still supply Hobbs Store in 1996.

Sweeping the black ormonoid floor was the first job every morning in the store. There was one spreader who would sprinkle each aisle with tea leaves. Then the sweepers would go into action, each sweeping an aisle. Later hardwood sawdust was used to prevent dust.

In the mid 1930s, night entertainment was provided at the store. Test matches between Australia and England were broadcast through loud speakers on Hobbs verandah. At 8.00 pm on Saturday nights large crowds would gather to listen.

A big staff was necessary as many products were purchased in bulk and needed weighing - currants, sultanas, dates, biscuits, sugar, flour, rice, nutmeg, mustard, alum, washing soda (people made their own soap), vinegar etc. Milking the house cow, in the bails behind the store, was another staff requirement from 1920 until 1965. The lolly mixing was always a favourite job of new staff. When an account was paid, Hobbs traditionally handed out a bag of mixed sweets.

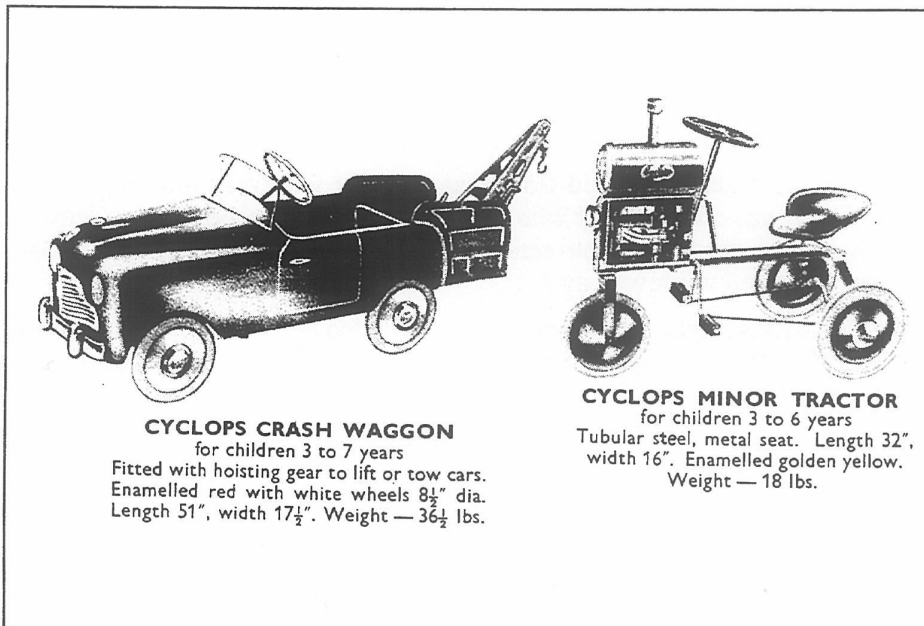
Strong men were needed on the staff as there was much lifting to be done. In the 1940s super phosphate and wheat came in 180 pound bags. There were 12 bags to the ton. This product was collected at the railhead in Nimmitabel and unloaded manually. Bran, pollard and crushed wheat, the standard dairy produce to feed to cows while in the bails, came in 140 pound and 120 pound bags and these also had to be unloaded from the delivery trucks, wheeled by trolley into the feed storage room and then reloaded on to the cream trucks for delivery to the farmers. The main method of delivery was by cream truck.

The cream truck collected and sorted the empty cream cans from the Bemboka Factory the night before the set delivery day. The 75 dairy farmers relied on this truck for deliveries of produce, groceries, bread, mail and newspapers.

Late night shopping is not just a modern day city feature. Trading hours up until the late 1940s were 48 hours per week including:

Wednesday	8.00am - 1.00pm
Saturday	8.00am - 9.00pm

Many ladies enjoyed late night shopping, especially at the beginning of the new credit month. While they shopped, the men played billiards at the School of Arts, socialised at the hotel or played cards and enjoyed pies and peas at the fruit shops. Rationing of everyday items such as tea, butter (2 ounces per person per week), sugar, clothing and petrol was enforced during the Second World War years. In 1940, private users of petrol were allowed petrol for just



**CYCLOPS CRASH WAGGON**  
for children 3 to 7 years  
Fitted with hoisting gear to lift or tow cars.  
Enamelled red with white wheels 8½" dia.  
Length 51", width 17½". Weight — 36½ lbs.

**CYCLOPS MINOR TRACTOR**  
for children 3 to 6 years  
Tubular steel, metal seat. Length 32",  
width 16". Enamelled golden yellow.  
Weight — 18 lbs.

Sample of toys available from Hobbs Toy Section in the 1950s.

16 miles a week. Hobbs Store became a mecca on the Far South Coast and Monaro for the purchasing of crockery, hardware and other goods not on ration.

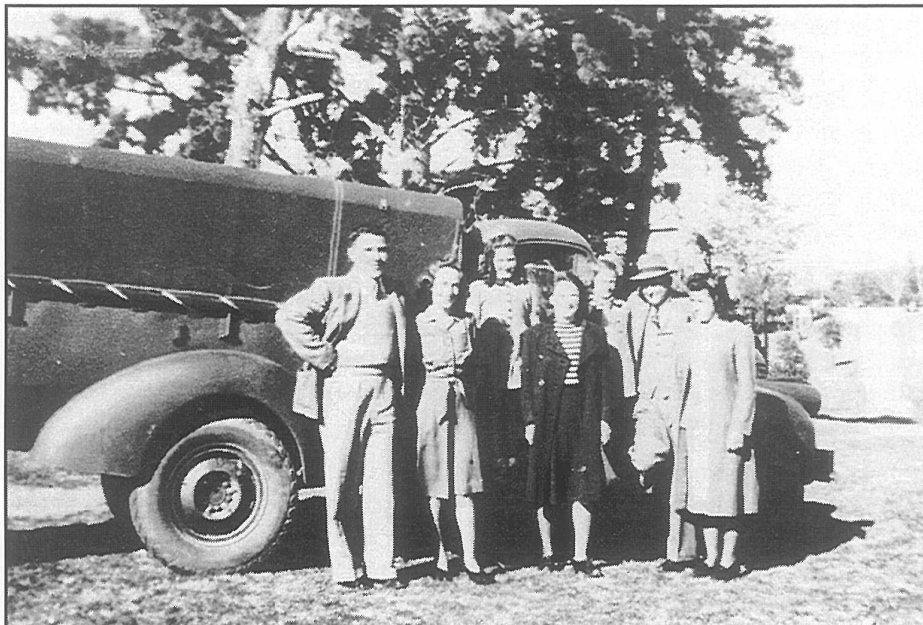
Petrol deliveries changed when the Tathra port was closed in 1954. Des Heffernan was contracted to collect semi-trailer loads of petrol drums from Nowra. On arrival at the store, the drums were still hand-decanted into the underground tanks. Over time, bulk petrol became available from the docks at Eden. N H Hobbs joined the Ampol Company in the 1940s, and Jack Hobbs was presented with a plaque in 1990 to commemorate 45 years' association with the company - the oldest NSW dealership. By 1980, N H Hobbs & Son had purchased their own bulk petrol truck. This enabled them to collect bulk fuel from Eden and pump this straight into the underground tanks. Also, farm delivery became much less labour intensive as most farmers had overhead or on-ground storage facilities.

Finn's building across the road from Hobbs Store (later Bemboka Hardware) was used by Hobbs from 1936. Most of the time it was used as a furniture showroom. Each November and December the furniture would give way to toys, and many small children, with sticky fingers and bright eyes, would wander along the aisles, looking longingly at the assorted dolls, cowboy suits and Cyclops wagons and scooters.

After World War II, the store started a delivery service once a month to Kameruka in a 1929 Chevrolet converted into a utility. It was not unusual to deliver linoleum and toys to Kameruka farms after the children had gone to bed on Christmas Eve. One customer is remembered ordering lino for his wife at Christmas. When asked the size he said, *'You know, Jack, the same size as last year - we always get new lino for the kitchen at Christmas.'* Many of the rooms in the farm houses were out of square. The lino was rolled out on the top shop verandah and cut with a large pair of scissors.

The war years changed life for many families. The Hobbs family was not an exception as the eldest child, Ronald, was killed in 1944. Jack, the second son, joined his father in business in 1945 and the store became known as N H Hobbs and Son. Nicholas Hobbs was still a staunch supporter of the football and hockey teams and an enthusiastic fund raiser for the proposed new Memorial Hall. He died in 1963, and at this time Jack's wife, Margaret (a former teacher), joined the business.

This was the beginning of changes in processed foods. The store ordered its first freezer and dairy case, and the town folk were able to buy frozen icecreams, peas and dinners. Of course, to go along with the TV dinners the homes needed television. Roy Howard, through Hobbs Store, visited locals and was able to offer televisions on terms, to take advantage of the ABC booster station operating on Brown Mountain. Biscuits were no longer weighed out individually. Packaged items such as sugar, prunes, flour and rice became the norm.



Hobbs delivery truck off to hockey in the 1940s, Col Gottaas, Norma Dunning, Gloria Alcock, Connie Buckley, Judy Davidson, Bill Davidson (driver), Eileen Gottaas.

For many years grocery orders had been assembled in the store by the staff. The customer would send a list in with the delivery person, telephone the order in, or bring a list to the store and wait. The order would be handwritten, item by item, on to one or several docketts. Then, the staff would rush around the store, collecting items and recording the prices, until a huge pile of groceries was assembled on the counter. Some items, such as soap, would be wrapped in newspaper to prevent spoiling of the foodstuffs. Cardboard boxes would be carefully chosen, groceries packed in and the boxes tied with rope which was dangling down from above the counter. The boxes were then labelled for delivery or carried to the waiting customer's vehicle.

Over time the roads improved. The once dusty Brown Mountain road was sealed and the time taken for the Bemboka-Bega journey was almost halved. The reliance on the general store diminished as more local residents were employed in Bega.

In 1984, Margaret Hobbs died at the early age of 57 years. Jack Hobbs chose to stay on in his business and was joined by his son, John, and daughter, Christine. Trading continued to be on a seven-day-a-week basis. Competition from the supermarkets, with their greater buying power, saw a change in the operation of Hobbs Store. Handwritten grocery orders to Davis & Penney in Bega were replaced by an electronic telephone ordering system to a Melbourne buying group, Composite Buyers. Even though the freight per pallet was \$40,



the buying power of this independent group allowed the country store to continue to compete through the Budget Rite banner.

Traditionally, price tickets were handwritten and thumb-tacked to the shelves. Prices often remained unchanged from year to year. By the mid-1980s these price tickets were removed and price guns were used in the store to roll the prices on to grocery items. Packing nights were introduced to ensure that shelves were replenished. Rotation of perishable items became imperative with the introduction of 'use by' dates.

A new Liquor Licence was granted in 1987, adding to the variety offered by the store to the local and passing trade. The Licensing Magistrate, in his summary, described the store as offering an extraordinary range of services including groceries, petrol, ladies and men's wear, hardware, veterinary requirements, machinery including motor bikes, produce, toys, saddlery, electrical goods, gas services and fertilizer.

To accommodate the liquor in the main store, it was necessary to utilise the Finn store building on the opposite side of Loftus Street. All hardware and veterinary goods were moved to the new location under the careful supervision of Peter Gottaas, staff member. For three years the business continued under two roofs. In June 1990, Peter and Johanna Gottaas purchased the hardware business and commenced trading as Bemboka Hardware. In November 1990, Jack Hobbs retired after 45 years in business, and long-time staff member, Brad Bobbin and his wife, Maree, became proprietors.

#### HOBBS STORE STAFF

(since 1920)

N H Hobbs (43 years)	Eileen Allen (Gottaas)
Lance Redgrave	Betty Bodycote
Charlie Walker	Freda Green (Love)
Pearl Poole	Maria Atkins (Coman)
Lil Hush	Les Preston (45 years)
Dolly Rolfe (Wilton)	Judy Carpenter (Davidson)
Doreen Thornton (Keys)	Patty Jones (Price)
Una Murphy (Keys)	Gloria Parish (Price)
Ernie Gottaas	Dianne Buckley (Collins)
Bill Davidson (42 years)	James Buckley
Bill Jerrett	Margaret Hobbs (Rutter)
Dulcie Sheehan (Geraghty)	Bradley Bobbin
Ivy Walker (Geraghty)	Joyce Handcock (Carpenter)
Veronica Gottaas (Geraghty)	Peter Gottaas
Madge Keys (Geraghty)	John Hobbs
Lillian Dunne (Ward)	Christine Gazzard (Hobbs)
Bill Taylor	Johanna Gottaas (Van Zanten)
Jack Hobbs (45 years)	James Taylor
Noeline Green	Maree Bobbin (Bateman)
Connie Collins (Buckley)	

A special tribute should be made to the staff of Hobbs Store. The store could not have operated over such a long time frame without the commitment and loyalty of the staff. Many of those employed stayed for upwards of 20 years and they adapted to the many changes over time.

*S*ugar  
*A*rrowroot  
*V*inegar  
*I*nsect Powder  
*N*uts  
*G*roats  
*S*oap

*"Buy them here  
they will all mean  
savings to you."*

**BUY LOCALLY**

AND SUPPORT THE DISTRICT  
THAT SUPPORTS YOU.  
EVERYTHING FOR EVERYBODY  
WITH VALUES SECOND TO  
NONE.

**N. H. HOBBS**  
GENERAL STOREKEEPER  
Phone 7 BEMBOKA

Personalised paper bag