



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Paper No. : 183

Prepared and Presented by: J. T. Ruxton

Date: 22nd November 2010.

Bro. WILLIAM ALBERT FLICK (1890-1980) PEST EXTERMINATOR

William Flick was born on 14th February 1890 at Lismore, New South Wales, second of eight children of native-born parents William Flick, a self-styled "Richmond River Pioneer" and dairy farmer, and his wife Sarah, nee Atkin. His grandfather Jacob Flick had emigrated from Alsace and the family developed interests in cedar getting, timber shipping, cattle dealing and dairying.

Albie grew up on his father's farm at Ewingsdale, Byron Bay, and was educated locally. At the Pacific Hall, Mullumbimby, on 3rd February 1915 he married with Anglican rites Phyllis Pearl Jamison. The couple began experiments to rid their Tyagarah dairy farm of termites. Building on their experience of bee keeping they saw the possibility of using working termites to poison the queen. Eventually they developed an arsenical compound, a "secret: red powder, fine enough to be carried, eaten and spread by grooming throughout a colony. It effectively exterminated termites on their own and surrounding properties. The process was patented in 1937.

Phyllis had quickly recognised the commercial potential. Bill, as he was known to his associates, began acquiring testimonials and charging for his services from about 1918; he also trained others in Sydney and Brisbane. The Flicks moved to Glen Innes in 1924 for the sake of their daughter's asthma and then to Perth to treat pest problems in underground telephone cables. Each time they left trained "Flickmen" to carry on the work. They drove back from Perth and in 1928 settled at Hornsby, Sydney. In the 1930s W A Flick & Co. successfully expanded into the cyanide fumigation of cockroaches and bedbugs in ships and hotels. During World War 2 the business expanded as a protected industry with government contracts for pest control in hospitals and barracks.

Flick continued to do some of the eradication work himself and introduced his sons to it. He remained unsophisticated with a reputation for honesty and good humour and valued his relations with clients. A strong man of middle height he enjoyed sport, particularly tennis and fishing and demonstrated his woodchopping skills at the Royal Easter Show into the 1930s. It was at the show that a signwriter came up with the slogan, "Remember- one flick and they're gone." On billboards and radio the catchphrase made the company a household name and gave a particularly entomological edge to the word "flick" in Australia.

After the war the firm's hectic growth and loose control necessitated reorganisation. The business was incorporated as W A Flick & Co Pty Ltd. More staff were recruited and Flick passed the management to his sons. Although he remained chairman of directors he had effectively retired by 1950. The company continued to expand on the basis of eradication rather than prevention, diversifying into allied areas such as crop spraying and introducing organochlorines and organophosphates. Fifteen overseas branches were established, mainly around the Pacific.

In semi-retirement at Newport, Flick became a lawn bowler. He was awarded OBE in 1972. Survived by his daughter and three sons he died on 10th May at his Newport home and was buried in Mona Vale cemetery. His wife had died in 1977.

When the family sold out in 1986 W A Flick & Co had been Australia's largest pest company and one that was among the largest in the world.

William Albert Flick was initiated, passed and raised in Lodge Cavanbah No 231, UGL of NSW & ACT meeting at Byron Bay, on 19th July 1923, 18th October 1923 and 20th December 1923 respectively. He called off that lodge on 18th June 1931, later affiliating with Lodge Hornsby No 262 on 28th November 1936, the same night that his son, William, was initiated. He called off that lodge on 17th August 1938. William junior called off lodge Hornsby 20th March 2002.

Ref: Records of UGL of NSW & ACT
Wikipedia