

# The Fence

Maggie Hickey continues on from last time ...

**W**e left the inhabitants of 102 Buck Lane, landlady Vi and her tenants Fred, Hermione, Ted and Raj, assuming life would resume as though nothing had ever happened to disturb their happy-go-lucky state. Things seldom work out that way though, do they?

Renovations had been taking place next door. The place throbbed to noise and vibrations from jack hammers as walls were knocked down, floorboards ripped up and ancient bathroom and kitchen fittings removed. It seemed the entire innards of number 104 were being disgorged into huge skips and carted away.

Owner Nigel Lamont was 'something in the city'. Vi was unimpressed. She didn't take to Nigel and wife Clarissa. "Stuck up," she pronounced with a sniff. The demolition team was replaced by painters, decorators, electricians and plumbers. A furniture lorry arrived with Nigel and Clarissa's possessions and they moved in.

Ted was pleased when the renovations seemed to be at an end. He worked from home so found the builders' noise a real distraction and had been forced to decamp with his computer to the public library, which was all very well but the adjacent coffee shop, complete with enticing cakes and attractive waitresses, was proving costly and time-consuming.

Fred had supposedly given up smoking on account of the impending birth of his and Hermione's baby but after work he often felt the need to visit Ted upstairs.

"Evening mate, thought I should check on Hermione's pot plants," Fred would suggest. Nodding agreement, Ted would lead the way up steps and ladder to the roof garden where they'd light up.

"Nice up here," Fred declared as the autumnal wind whipped around their legs.

"Great," agreed Ted expelling a stream of carcinogens into the chilly air.

One evening, after taking a cursory look at the pot plants, they peered across to next door's garden. It had suffered during the renovations as successive trucks, skips and equip-

ment parked over the lawn. Now a shiny green van proclaiming 'Cyril's Executive Landscape Gardening Service' stood in their place.

"What do you think constitutes an 'executive landscape' or is it a landscaping service only for executives?" enquired Raj, who'd joined them for a smoke.

"What it constitutes," complained Ted, "is more noise and upheaval."

Together, the landscaper and Nigel walked around the garden, deciding on work to be done. Nigel pointed out the wall dividing 104 from 106; solid brick and in good condition. All okay there.

They turned to regard the division between 102 and 104 and now there were frowns and head shaking. Here was a decrepit wooden fence. It sagged and swayed, it creaked and shook. Several palings had fallen out, others had broken away like rotting teeth in diseased gums. Nigel shuddered, Cyril indicated it would all have to be taken down and replaced.

This was bad enough to the onlookers above but worse was to come and Raj anticipated it with terrible accuracy.

"I think they have noticed the position of the fence as well as its condition."

For it was clear that as well as needing replacement, the existing fence had been built well across the true boundary. An Englishman's home is his castle; his garden is his estate and Nigel's estate had been robbed of over

a metre along its entire length. Debate ensued. Clarissa emerged and her high-pitched voice could be heard in loud complaint. The body language indicated the unacceptability of this situation and an intention to do something about it.

The rooftop trio scuttled downstairs to alert Vi to this impending threat. The backyard of 102 and specifically the pile of old bricks heaped up by the fence were set to be disturbed with goodness only knew what consequence.

To their surprise, Vi received their news with complete equanimity.

"I thought them two wouldn't stop at tarring up the house," she declared. "I knew they'd be doin' the garden next and I knew they'd be onto that fence so I been in touch with Pete and his girl Nicole."

In happier days before he started drinking, Vi's father had built the original fence. The owner of 104 kept racing pigeons. He wasn't interested in gardening, wanting only enough shed space for his birds, so a deal was done. In return for vegetables from Vi's mum, the neighbour agreed a fence could be built giving 102 more land. It was an arrangement suiting all parties at the time.

A crafty smile played around Vi's old lips. She explained that her cousin Pete was a builder and his daughter Nicole, a lawyer.

"Done very well, that girl," declared their landlady. Vi's tenants remained perplexed. What could be done to avert disaster and how were this Pete and Nicole to help?

On Saturday morning the occupants of 102 Buck Lane gathered in Vi's basement flat. There was whistle and a knock before a cheery looking chap in flat cap and overalls and a slim,

## Local mystery revealed

Fran Ifould's brush with real estate advertising

**I** got approached to paint a sign for a new development out near Foxs\* Elbow by a real estate agent from Kurrajong. They had decided to name it Mount Pleasant. I have no idea where the name came from; they probably thought it would sell well.

I knew I could paint the sign because I've done a fair amount of big work like that, so I gave him a price. I asked for half up front, which he gave quite happily, but then in actual fact it was a rushed job — they are always rushed jobs. But I got it done — and then he wasn't forthcoming with the rest of bill, the other half of the money.

He didn't complain about the work or anything, he just never responded. I communicated with his office in Kurrajong, and his secretary was always totally evasive; I wrote him letters that were never answered.

Six months later I'd had no success whatsoever getting paid so I just reclaimed half the sign. Easy. I went out with my signwriting truck, my overalls and a ladder on a Tuesday afternoon and Bob's your uncle, I painted half of it out.

I couldn't leave it as 'Mount P' so I had to take out the first half of the letters instead.

Colourbond, I've since discovered, doesn't fade because the process of making colourbond bakes the colour in. So although I went to a lot of trouble to get exactly the same colour as the colourbond, the paint that colourbond supplies to match fades at four

times the rate of the actual colourbond metal. Over time it is becoming more and more obvious what was originally there.

Nobody has ever said anything to me about it although they did get a sign writer in Goulburn to make another sign claiming it to be Foxs Elbow, which as you know is the original name for that area.

That sign was only on canvas, on a frame attached to the side of the shed. It lasted about three weeks and then it blew down, so ... my work's still there.

It's been there for about fifteen years now; you'd think they'd put a roller to it, wouldn't you. It's become folklore.

\* Foxs Elbow (with no apostrophe or 'e' is correct. It is named after a family, not a few animals. The Geographical Names Board has removed apostrophes from all place and road names eg. Kings Highway.



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