



By Ken Dyer

REFLECTIONS

JC Skull: Velvet Glove - Iron Fist

"Upright, conscientious, shrewd, efficient, but always fair and affable"-these were the words used by his contemporaries when Jack (John Christopher) Skull resigned from his position with the South Australian League in 1950 after serving as Chairman of Stewards for 38 years in Western Australia and South Australia. He was believed to be seventy eight years of age at the date of his retirement surely the oldest chairman of stewards ever.

In his prime he was recognized as the foremost Chairman of Stewards in Australia and even today when most of his contemporaries have passed away he has left an honourable memory that has been passed down for a good part of the fifty years since he himself passed away.

In a sporting profile written by Laurie Jervis Junior in 1950 in an Adelaide newspaper on the retirement of Jack Skull in Adelaide, Jervis said that "Skull was born in England around the late 1860's (sic 1872) and that his father was a bookmaker". (sic. Although Jack Skull became an expert engineer in the installation and the maintenance of printing machinery it has been thought by earlier writers that he became interested naturally enough in the horse industry as a hobby his father being a racing bookmaker, however, given Jack Skull's involvement in printing machine installation it is not improbable instead that his father was involved in a printery occupation. Given that Skull later said he was involved with racing in England he may have become interested in racing on his own account).

"As a young man he was in charge of the installation of new machinery at the London Financial News printing machine house and later installed new printing machines at the "Express" at Leeds in the North of England. When the firm that installed the printing equipment for the "Leeds Express" won the contract to install the latest machinery at the "West Australian" in far away Perth, Jack Skull was given the task of travelling to Perth for the installation arriving there in 1897".

This information seems to be basically correct, however, there appears to be some history missing from Jervis' profile at this point. Previously Jack Skull in 1932 in his own words in the Western Australian Sporting Record (which he edited) said "and with the experience gained in England and in South Africa in which countries I was closely associated with racing" etc.

This seems to indicate that Skull was located in South Africa for a time and quite possibly he was sent there first to install printing machinery and then came on to Perth.

On completion of the job in Perth, Skull was demonstrating the new equipment to the Managing Director of the "West Australian"(Sir Winthrop Hackett) when he accidentally put his fingers too close to some working parts and lost the second and third fingers of his right hand. This accident reduced his efficiency in his chosen profession and to offset this he began to take an interest once again in racing as a hobby and he also began to think about settling in Western Australia.

Nine years later Jack Skull had become a fairly well known owner of thoroughbred and pony racehorses in Perth and on the goldfields where prizemoney was good for lower grade horses.

His best horse in this time was the good sprinter Gauze which won seven races on end including the Coolgardie Handicap a big race in those days of the goldfields boom. There is no doubt that mixing with



Jack Skull (left)

other owners and trainers and jockeys he became very well known and knowledgeable about the racing game as it was in those days.

During this time he met up with James Brennan who was two years his junior and even then beginning to make his name in horse sports. Brennan became President of the Western Australian Trotting Association (WATA) a non-proprietary trotting club and also the controlling body, which after moving around various venues settled at the WA Cricket Association (WACA) grounds in 1910. It was evident to Skull that Brennan was strongly opposed to proprietary racing and even more opposed to entrepreneurs from the eastern States moving into racing in Western Australia.

Notwithstanding the views of Brennan, Skull went off into proprietary racing after he was approached by John Wren's manager in the west (Alexander Clydesdale) in 1912 to become Chairman of Stewards at a new thoroughbred track in Perth called Goodwood Park. Skull had no experience at this level but for Wren to appoint Skull to the position he must have been sure that Skull had sufficient experience as an owner and a commanding presence to carry out a demanding task.

In these years we find from various sources that John Wren in the guise of the Belmont Racing Club Ltd had leased nearby Belmont Park. The Cockram family the owner of Belmont Park had spent many thousands of pounds in improvements building the track from natural bushland. Belmont Park under Wren's regime was a proprietary company but it raced under the WA Turf Club (WATC) rules and was considered a registered club but it was crippled by the fact that the WATC only allocated Belmont Park six racing dates per year.

Under Wren's management the first meeting at Belmont Park was held in May 1912 and it flourished greater than any other proprietary club, or race club for that matter, had previously done. The big difference between Wren's proprietary company and the principal race club was the prizemoney offered by Belmont Park which was substantially more. As a result there was friction between the two

bodies which could not be resolved but Wren was smarting under restrictive conditions imposed by the WATC on Belmont Park.

AE Cockram already the owner and lessor of Belmont Park and, it is surmised, at the behest of John Wren, decided to build a new nearly seven furlong track adjacent to Belmont Park which he called Goodwood Park. The ownership of this new course was registered in the name of Cockram's brother who leased it to a John Wren Syndicate. Opening in July 1912 with Jack Skull as its Chairman of Stewards, Goodwood Park was an unregistered racetrack-that is to say it was not registered with the WA TC-but in other respects it paid its Government taxes and charges.

Owners, trainers, jockeys and horses that were induced to race at Goodwood Park and other unregistered racetracks were usually disqualified from racing at the registered tracks and so a sub-culture grew up whereby racing participants with horses not good enough to race at registered meetings could race for prizemoney that grew to be greater than that provided by registered courses.

During Goodwood Park's tenure the John Wren machine endeavoured to compete with the WA TA then racing at night at the WACA grounds even to the extent of programming a trotting race on the galloping program with prizemoney at four times the level of the WATA in an attempt to destabilize that organisation.

Jack Skull questioned John Wren's man in Perth as to the reason for the inclusion of a trotting race and the high prizemoney-"whatever for? We're doing all right here with the gallopers. Who is going to handicap them? You are"was the answer.

Skull said his first job was to clean up the racing at unregistered meetings which had deteriorated under other entrepreneurs and the saying "keeping it clean" became his motto wherever he was employed in future years. Even in the beginning Skull became well known for his fairness and strength in dealing with wrong doing.

Knowing nothing of trotting he was severely tested in his first trotting race at Goodwood Park. Working out his handicaps he put markers around the course on the running rail but on race morning he checked the course and found that the backmarkers position had been brought forward by thirty yards.

Owners racing their trotters at unregistered Goodwood Park meetings were automatically disqualified by the WATA under James Brennan's presidency but after the demise of Goodwood Park they were let back into trotting at the WACA.

Racing at Goodwood Park had prospered under the shrewd but stern stewardship of Jack Skull and when the lease of Goodwood Park expired the Wren machine bought two unregistered pony racecourses each about a mile in circumference on the WA goldfields. The tracks were known as the Lakeside Track at Boulder and the Summerfield Track at Kalgoorlie and they were part of the newly formed WA Racing Association-most likely a front for a John Wren syndicate.

Jack Skull was invited by John Wren personally to take up the multi position of secretary/handicapper/treasurer/chairman of stewards. Skull could programme races for trotters, ponies and gallopers as and when he liked and he usually raced after the miners payday.

In an interview published on his retirement in 1950, Skull said "that in the first few months on the goldfields you had to see the (huge) crowds and the (large number of) horses to believe it. I think there more ringtails than fair dinkum horses when we started. They came from all over Australia. The jockeys who rode on the two courses were mostly lads who had run away from apprenticeships in Perth. They were automatically disqualified from racing on registered tracks. It's not that they were bushrangers but when racing on the two (goldfields) courses had been boosted from forty pounds stakes to over five hundred pounds in a few months Perth owners decided they would rather race at Kalgoorlie and sent their teams of horses there. It was those good horses which made the racing on the two courses".

According to Laurie Jervis Junior "the Chief Stipe had a pony and trap under the grand stand and whenever he saw a horse drifting alarmingly in the betting he would go around to the barrier. Without preamble he would tell the jockey "your horse has gone in the betting. You're on two years if you don't win or run a decent race".

In this instance Skull held the trump card for if they were disqualified at an unregistered meeting they had nowhere else to go.

To help Jack Skull keep check he had a special information fund which he used to good advantage. On one occasion he received a telegram from Perth stating that an American made hand battery was on its way to a Kalgoorlie jockey. Going to the training track the next morning Skull said to the jockey "give me a look at the battery you've got, sonny". The boy's face went white he was so dumbfounded but he pulled the battery from his breeches. "What are you going to do with me Mr Skull"- "Nothing yet but you are lucky I did not catch you with it in a race you'd have got life". Shaken the boy went away-he'd only had the battery for two hours.

Batteries, rather than drugs, were constantly to be guarded against in those days and there were many other examples of batteries being found in the clothing and equipment of jockeys.

In 1916 after two years of racing on the goldfields Wren's syndicate sold the Boulder/Kalgoorlie racecourses and they were taken over by the Goldfields Racing Conference of which Mr AV Kewney was the Secretary/Manager.

And so Jack Skull at age forty four returned to Perth a much wiser and a very experienced racing official who had learned a tricky arduous job in the hotbed of unregistered racing where nearly anything would be tried. The mastering of unregistered racing had made "Skull one of the shrewdest overseers of racing and trotting Australia has had" and he was seldom equalled if at all in his own era. Indeed it might be said of him of the entire 20th century.

In 1917 in Perth, Jack Skull fortuitously met up again with James Brennan then Vice President of the WATA which was then racing at the WACA grounds. Previously the WATA had raced at Belmont Park, then at Claremont Showgrounds before moving to the WACA in 1910. Brennan was inaugural President of the WATA from 1910-14 as he was later still in 1918-19 and again 1923-29.

Brennan explained that although the WACA ground had been switched to night trotting in January 1914, by 1917 the attendance was declining and confidence was at a low. In addition Dudley Braham the Handicapper/Chairman of Stewards had moved to a similar position with the WATC. He needed a strong person to take over control of racing.

Offering the vacant position to Jack Skull, Brennan hoped thereby that Skull's presence and his motto "keeping it clean" would instill confidence in trotting at the WACA a decision and appointment he would never have cause to regret. However, a consequence of Skull's appointment by Brennan had an outcome that eventually took place in 1932.

James Brennan a great visionary was also an ardent anti-proprietary advocate and spoke out very strongly against John Wren's interests in trotting and racing not only in WA but also in Victoria and Queensland. It was very strange turnabout for Jack Skull-having worked for John Wren for five years, he now found he was on the opposite side of racing administration.

During the late 1910's and the whole of the 1920's in Jack Skull's tenure with the WATA, two big decisions were made by the WATA the first being the purchase in 1915 of land described as a mosquito ridden swamp nearly opposite the WACA grounds on the Swan River. The WATA developed this land over many years to a modern trotting raceway which when opened in 1929 was called Brennan Park but was ultimately renamed Gloucester Park.

The other major event in Jack Skull's time at the WACA and which came under his direct control was the introduction of international

racing by James Brennan in the form of the "Australasian Trotting Championships" in 1925 and again in 1926.

In October 1922, the WATA could not attend an interstate conference in Melbourne at which the first moves were made to establish a Central Register of Names (and other reciprocal arrangements) which eventually came to fruition under Sir Gilbert Dyett under the auspices of the Victoria Racing and Trotting Association in 1924.

This was the very first sign of reciprocity between principal clubs and controlling bodies throughout Australia acting together as one organisation. Previously each principal club had to make agreements individually with other interstate organisations.

However, in September 1923 James Brennan attended a Sydney Conference the major decision being the formal establishment of reciprocal relations which were adopted by New Zealand and Australian controlling bodies.

Jack Skull was therefore at the cutting edge of not only great improvements to trotting in WA but was also a participant in international racing and relationships. He was an official that had great experience in the rough and tumble of grass roots racing and was participating in his own way in trotting's surge into popularity in Perth. Skull and his team of stewards played no small part in this resurrection of trotting

In 1929 the WATA moved to its new headquarters at Brennan Park and an equal moment occurred when James Brennan resigned the same year as President of the WATA. The resignation of Brennan was brought about by infighting between Brennan and his Vice President JP Stratton over finance and the guarantor position. JP Stratton was elected President in 1930. Litigation over these issues and the change of the name of the track from Brennan Park to Gloucester Park lingered almost to the death of James Brennan in 1937 at the age of sixty five years. No journalist or author has yet been able to do justice to the Brennan v Stratton controversy.

In 1930 a few members of the Association at that years Annual General Meeting ventured to question the Committee about the performances of Committee owned horses racing at Brennan Park (later Gloucester Park). JP Stratton presiding said the Committee would discuss the matter. However, it appears that if it was discussed nothing came about as a result-there were no public directions to the Stipendiary Stewards.

The questions were obviously sparked by the retired President James Brennan who in a letter dated 26/11/1930 sent to all Members of the WATA the day before the 1930 AGM said in reference to proprietary racing and the question of committee owned horses:-

It will probably be urged that cancellation of reciprocal relations with some of the eastern organizations would have a harmful effect upon the sport here. That is absolute rubbish.

In some it is born of ignorance of the full and true facts and in others it is prompted by the desire to meet the wishes of those in the eastern States who have for the past twenty years waged war against trotting in this State as it has been conducted on non-proprietary lines and who have made every effort to gain control so that only a few individuals and not the whole community should profit. Of their near success, due to supineness on the part of many members and the machinations of others, I am somewhat fearful.

There are some who are large owners of horses which they lease, who are backers of stables and horses and who, as such, hold sway over lessees and reinsmen. This condition of affairs is, I say unreservedly, rampant at the present time and is doing irreparable harm to trotting financially and otherwise

Some may subscribe to the view that the prevailing depression can be attributed the decreased attendances, reduced totalisator investments and falling off in other forms of revenue. Nothing is further from the truth but is, in my opinion, being put forward purposely to hoodwink members, owners and the public. There is an object in casting such a gloom and that is to cloak the actions which are the real cause. The decreased attendances and falling off in receipts are due to the exercise of self interests and of parasitical influences by some of those now in authority and the fear of certain officials of losing their positions if they carry out their duties in respect to the manner of racing horses associated with certain stables.

Clearly these parts of the letter are barbs directed at JP Stratton and several of his Committee and it also makes reference to the reasons for the inactions of the Stipendiary Stewards.

At this time Stratton owned many pacers and some thoroughbreds as did many of his committee. Most of his race stock were brought in from the eastern states and from New Zealand. Stratton never raced his horses in his own name preferring to lease his horses instead to his friends and acquaintances. It would not take much research to establish the names of other members of the Committee to whom Brennan refers.

At the 1931 AGM members asked again what action had been taken about certain owners, trainers and horses. Stratton again referred the issues to his committee. However, whatever action if any the Committee was going to take was brought to a thundering head by Jack Skull who must have realized that if his alleged inactions were causing him and others great anxiety, paradoxically trouble would be in store for him personally if he took action-but he finally acted anyway.

One of JP Stratton's best pacers at the time was Northwood Lady who was on lease

to Andy Sheahan a former Victorian who had finally moved to Perth in 1926 and trained some horses on lease from Stratton after a stint for Alex Hunter who had left the sport in those years. Sheahan was the leading trainer/driver in Perth.

Northwood Lady was bred by Alex Hunter at Northwood Park in Victoria but on the breakup of his stud his stock was sold at two sales. At the final dispersal on 22/1/27 a bay filly foaled 1924 by Globe Derby from Honest Florrie was knocked down to a Mr Pratt of WA for 145 guineas a rather high price on that day. Whether Mr Pratt may have been commissioned by JP Stratton is not known but at all events the filly was registered in the name of JP Stratton and was leased, trained and driven by Andy Sheahan on her arrival in Perth.

Arriving in Perth in 1927 Northwood Lady won the 1928 Sires Produce Stakes and the Spring Gift finishing third in that years Derby to Bess Derby. By the time the 1931 AGM of the WA Trotting Association was held Northwood Lady had won 12 races and was reckoned to be a fair chance in the WA Cup to be raced on 28/12/31 in which the mare was handicapped off 12 yards.

At the Brennan Park meeting on 28/11/31 Northwood Lady started as a well backed 2/1 favourite but was unplaced. A week later the mare



J.P. Stratton

off 36 yards and again well backed to 2/1 favoritism but well driven this time put in a scintillating performance to win in her personal best winning rate in the Kellerberrin Handicap. This resulted in an extremely hostile and ugly demonstration by a large section of the attendance.

Inquiring into the performances of Northwood Lady, Jack Skull and his team of stewards disqualified for twelve months lessee/trainer/driver Andy Sheahan and Northwood Lady for inconsistency. This was a particularly game decision bearing in mind the mare was owned by the WA Trotting Association President-JP Stratton.

The disqualification caused a great sensation in Perth but however great was the public sensation it was probably less than the uproar that occurred within the confines of the Committee who must have wondered why one of their previously compliant senior staff had taken action against their president's horse albeit the mare was leased out.

Sheahan and the mare were unsuccessful on appeal which speaks volumes for Jack Skull's decision. JP Stratton did not sit on the Appeal Board - one of a number of Committee who also did not attend. Stratton's reason for not attending was due to his ownership of Northwood Lady and several others found reasons good enough not to attend-these included Messrs Simpson and Smiley.

This may be seen as a victory for the publicly maligned Jack Skull and his band of Stipendiary Stewards for implementing stronger action against wrong doers after a period of forbearance but the signs were it was more a Pyrrhic Victory (ie a victory gained at a cost).

The Daily News on 14/12/31 commented:-

In view of more recent happenings the question arises as to whether Sheahan was not unlucky.

The improved and retrograde showings of trotting horses have always been subjects for comment in trotting circles. Sheahan produced evidence that on the last two occasions on which he started Northwood Lady, the mare was backed with his monetary support. She ran badly; in fact was driven badly on the first occasion, but obtained a beautiful passage on the second occasion and driven a better race, won easily.

Another question arises. The Stewards permitted Northwood Lady to start on the second occasion as her performance on the first occasion was not questioned. She entered into a contract to win the second race, and yet was disqualified for so doing. At last Saturday's meeting the Stewards overlooked instances of reversals of form which were just as outstanding as was Northwood Lady's performance. In some instances horses who had won at their previous or recent starts finished "no-where" and in other cases horses who had not been in the picture for weeks and weeks showed wonderfully improved form.

If consistency was shown in the matter of dealing with inconsistent running, nothing further need to be said on the subject, but until that happy state of affairs is brought about there will always be dissatisfaction.

Racing stewards should not allow themselves to be swayed by the demonstration of the betting crowd. Their loyalty is so fickle and their better judgement often warped by monetary consideration

After these sensations there was a period of inactivity on the surface but underneath JP Stratton and his Committee had decided to re-arrange the Stewards and Senior Staff appointments without any prior

reference to Jack Skull. On 12/5/32 Skull received the following letter signed by JP Stratton.

Mr. JC Skull, Dear Sir, My Committee has given careful consideration to the question whether it would not be in the best interests of trotting if the positions of handicapper and chairman of stewards were amalgamated, the handicapper being appointed chairman of stewards and to hold that position in conjunction with that of handicapper.

The matter has been discussed frequently and the committee has now decided that the change should be made and your services as steward at once terminated. You have had no experience as handicapper and the result is that the change will involve your retirement.

It is because this was the result that the committee has hesitated so long in coming to a decision. Your service as chairman of stewards has been rendered over so long a period and been discharged to the satisfaction of the committee that it hesitated to take an act that would hurt your feelings.

The committee therefore proposed that although you will from this date cease to be a steward your pay will continue until the end of July next when your term expires. If a lump sum payment would be more helpful to you it will be paid.

The committee desires me to express to you its thanks for your loyal and good service over a long period of years and greatly regrets that force of circumstances has compelled the change. JP Stratton.

To this Jack Skull made the following reply:- **Mr. JP Stratton, Dear Sir, Your notification that the committee of your Association had found it expedient to retire me from the position of chairman of stewards has been received.**

You will appreciate the fact that the peremptory termination of an office that I have filled for a period of 15 years with complete satisfaction to all previous committee is in the nature of a considerable shock to me. I note that it is urged that an amalgamation of offices is advanced as the reason for this drastic action.

Permit me to offer the suggestion that this is merely a subterfuge. During my long term as practically the controller of racing I have exercised my powers fearlessly and without respect to persons. That my services have been dispensed with without regard to any disqualifications that may have been imposed upon any person or persons in particular whether employed or interested with any members of the committee should in my opinion be particularly stressed and especially by yourself when public statements are being made with respect to the new arrangements you have determined upon.

I thank the committee for their expressions through your agency, of appreciation of my services to the Association.

With reference to your offer to have paid to me a cheque offering salary that would have accrued to me to the end of July next, I beg to accept same. In doing so it will enable me to take the holiday I desired during March last but which was denied me unless I agreed to accept leave without pay-a proposition that had never previously been made to any official during the 15 years of my intimate association with the organization. JC Skull

The correspondence above was published in the WA Daily Mail and repeated in the Australian Trotting Record of 25/5/32 under the heading "OFFICIAL ALLEGES UNFAIR TREATMENT".



J.C. Skull

It is quite obvious that Skull had no doubts as to why he was retrenched and it is perfectly obvious too that Stratton and his committee had the retrenchment in mind at least as far back as February and probably much earlier when his leave request was denied. The decision was most likely made soon after the appeal was dismissed but it took some time to find an excuse to relieve Skull of his duties.

The dismissal caused a public furore in Perth that lasted for many years and it was imprinted in most trotting participants memories for at least as long as 1946 when a Royal Commission was held into the WA Trotting Association committee's guarantor system and control of trotting. At the Royal Commission reference was made and evidence was given as to the dismissal of Jack Skull some 14 years earlier. The Royal Commissioner (Mr Charles McLean) speaking in 1946 said the dismissal was an act of the committee of the WATA engineered by JP Stratton.

Just on twenty years later whilst on a visit to Perth in 1965 I had a long interview with JP Stratton who over a period of hours gave me a personal historical overview of his earlier turbulent life at the WA Trotting Association. His stories covered such topics as the James Brennan era, the Brennan Park/Gloucester Park affair, the Guarantor System, the WA Royal Commission into Trotting and right at the end he briefly mentioned that when he leased his stock for racing purposes he always inserted a clause into the lease to the effect that the horse was always to be raced on its merits otherwise the lease was void. Stratton said this was because of some earlier problems with lessees but he was not specific.

Later on I came across some information about Northwood Lady from which I could speculate that Stratton's earliest lease problem was with Andy Sheahan and Northwood Lady way back in 1931 some 24 years previously. And so in 1965 the disqualification and consequent events including Jack Skull's dismissal still weighed heavily on Stratton's mind.

Jack Skull was replaced by W Downey as Chairman of Stewards and Handicapper whilst his deputy was WH Perry the father of Ern (EW) Perry who later became the long term Secretary of the WA Trotting Association many of those years under President JP Stratton.

By July 1932, Jack Skull had found a new profession-that of a journalist/owner of the magazine "WA Sporting Record and Dramatic Review". The magazine was the ideal platform for Skull to air his views on different sporting matters and he was not subject to quasi-censorship or interference through influences of Stratton and his newspaper friends.

Nevertheless in the short term Skull and Stratton engaged in litigation. Skull still not happy with his dismissal and Stratton unhappy with their problems being publicly aired.

In early 1932 and probably unknown to Jack Skull at the time an event was occurring in Adelaide, SA, that was to eventually affect his future life and to propel him back into trotting at the highest levels albeit it took nearly two years to come about.

The January 27, 1932 issue of the "Australian Trotting Record" notes that South Australian owner/trainer/driver HH Hambley and his mare Southern Lady had been disqualified for 12 months. Under the rules of the SA Trotting League Hambley was allowed to continue racing until his appeal was heard. The Stewards disagreed with the rule being implemented in the case of Hambley despite having previously allowed other disqualified persons the benefits of the rule.

At the appeal the Stewards refused to give evidence and Hambley's appeal had to be upheld. Furthermore the Stewards having given an ultimatum that if Hambley was permitted to race they would vacate their positions.

The SA Trotting Association (later Club) and the SA Trotting League (the Controlling Body) appointed temporary new officials to fill the

vacancies but the Association soon found they needed an experienced Chairman of Stewards to head up their administration. This became urgent during 1933 when the Association obtained Government legislation for betting at night at the Wayville Showgrounds.

During the latter months of 1933 South Australian officials met with Jack Skull in Perth and enticed him to take up the appointment as Chairman of Stewards at Wayville on a temporary basis to start and if he was happy with life in Adelaide then further contracts would be made. The appointment stunned the racing fraternity in Perth but a good many of his friends and acquaintances turned up to his Valedictory

Dinner held at the Savoy Hotel. The dinner had been arranged by Skull's old friend James Brennan who was sad to see Skull depart but realized this was a great opportunity for Skull to start afresh and to reassert himself at high levels.

Leaving Perth by steamer together with his wife (May Rose Skull) Jack Skull arrived in Adelaide a week before his Wayville appointment commenced. However, just prior to his arrival in Adelaide the SA League and Association received a deputation from owners, trainers and drivers on the question of Jack Skull's purported strict enforcement of the rules. They were apprehensive his strictness would force them from the sport. On being assured that Jack Skull was strict but always very fair the deputation went away satisfied.

Night trotting at Wayville with betting opened on 27th January, 1934 and under Jack Skull's control very quickly became a mecca for interstate owners and horsemen who relished the good prizemoney and Skull's strict but fair dealing.

From 1934 to 1937 Skull was employed solely by the SA Trotting Association as its Chairman of Stewards at Wayville but this situation changed in mid 1937 when the SA Trotting League took over control of all South Australian stewards. Jack Skull was re-appointed the League's Chairman of Stewards a position he retained until 1950. "Tuxedo"(Joe Coulter) said in article on 9/6/37 "one thing Mr Skull did for the sport from the time he commenced his duties at Wayville was to instill confidence in trotting into the public domain".

Previously Edgar Tatlow from Tasmania had visited a Wayville meeting in May 1935 and paid "a special tribute to Jack Skull for his 100 percent efficiency in conducting meetings and regarded the fearlessness of his actions as the chief means to this satisfactory state of affairs".

In 1937 the SA Trotting Association conducted the second running of the Inter Dominion Championships at Wayville-the first having previously been conducted a year earlier in Perth, WA. The Adelaide series was a huge success despite publicity about Marble Bath (see previous issue of HRI) and in the end a huge crowd saw a spectacular Grand Final. However, there was sour note when the Australian Trotting Record of the time reported in a somewhat cryptic paragraph that the President of the WA Trotting Association (Mr JP Stratton) had not attended any of the Wayville Championship meetings due to business commitments.

The 1937 Inter Dominions were virtually the second of such international events that Jack Skull had supervised having previously controlled the 1925 and 1926 Australasian Championships for James Brennan in Perth. It is not thought that Jack Skull was particularly put out by the non-attendance of JP Stratton. However, all other States and New Zealand sent their representatives.

Although World War 2 intervened and severely curtailed racing throughout Australia Jack Skull was still retained by the SA Trotting League but by now he was slowly aging but at the age of seventy seven he was in charge of the 1949 Championships at Wayville. Having been in stipendiary control of 1925/1926 Australasian Championships and the 1937 Inter Dominion Championships in Adelaide his efforts for the 1949 series must surely have set

something of a record for a Chairman of Stewards to be in charge of three such prestigious series over three decades.

The 1949 series was won by Single Direct and was probably a worrisome series for Jack Skull, due to the small track and faster speed of the horses involved there was some interference in the various heats and a fall in the final.

In the new year of 1950 Jack Skull was at last feeling the strain of his advancing years and decided to take extended holidays. During his holidays his deputy FH Trott aged 72 years collapsed and died in March whilst the remaining stewards panel came under much criticism for inconsistent decisions. On his return Jack Skull was able to placate the respective administrators but found that his age (78) was working against him as the League now wanted to employ younger men. Realising the inevitable Jack Skull submitted his resignation effective 31st July, 1950.

Two valedictory dinners were held, one by the Weigall Oval owners trainers and Reinsman's Committee at Torrensville when several hundred trotting participants turned out to farewell the grand old man. Mr. JF Brazel a King's Counsel, leading Adelaide solicitor, and thoroughbred owner as well as a friend of Jack Skull presided. Many tributes and presentations were made during the evening by the Mayor of West Torrens, JJ Rice President of the SA Trotting Club, Gordon Pridham Secretary of the SA Trotting League, and LR Heath then Chairman of the Country Clubs Association and many others. Brazel and Skull were co-members of the Adelaide Tattersalls Club.

Jack Skull was given a great ovation when he responded and recalled the great many incidents that occurred in his long career which stretched back to 1897 in Western Australia.

The second dinner was given by the SA Trotting League at the Richmond Hotel in Adelaide. This was attended by notables who were absent from the Weigall Oval dinner. Again Skull regaled the

attendance with fresh stories from his past. He said he always hesitated about giving a youthful offender a heavy penalty for his first offence as disqualification was a stigma for life both in sport and business.

Jack Skull and his wife retired to Glandore near Adelaide but the SA Trotting League hearing that he was in poor circumstances and ill health settled an annual annuity on him for the rest of his days.

Jack Skull died in 1954 at the age of 82 years at the Royal Adelaide Hospital after a protracted illness and was buried at Centennial Park revered by the industry at large. The huge headstone that covers his grave was subscribed to by South Australian trotting participants. Joe Coulter (Tuxedo) gives the best short tribute to his life and service to the trotting industry.

"The greatest asset, however, to Perth and Adelaide trotting was the engagement of JC Skull. The presence of this man had a good effect both on those connected with the sport and those outside. Mr Skull was particularly pleased with the improvement of the sport as he had predicted great things for trotting both in WA and SA a prediction that came true and the big part he played in making it possible was amply told and retold at his valedictory dinners in 1950.

His primary objective during his administration was to keep the sport clean and he went forward in this direction during the years of the greatest growth of the sport. We are all greatly indebted to him. It is doubtful if Australia had ever known a chairman of stewards, racing or trotting, with the capabilities of Mr Skull".

Author's note: I have used a variety of sources to cover the many years of Jack Skull in stewardship in WA and SA and have quoted the individual source where possible. I must thank Ray Holloway of Perth who assisted in the provision of newspaper clippings and his own personal anecdotes of Jack Skull's days in Adelaide. Ray as a young man was employed by the SA Trotting League in the late 1940's and retains many great memories of this era.