

Who was 'Silent Joe'?

Norm Harris worked at the Charleston Road Saleyards where he was Superintendent. I mentioned to Norm that there is a short strip of asphalt leading up from the roadside to the entrance to the Bendigo East Swimming Pool and he said that was where 'Silent Joe' used to sit. This bloke worked for Bendigo Council as a cartage contractor, but no one seemed to know his real name – it was always 'Silent Joe'.

Norm has supplied some memories of a Council tar depot and crushing works at the corner of Lansell Street and Charleston Road Bendigo East. The Manager, Bill Mitchell, had the asphalt dispatched from there for many years. An old identity, 'Silent Joe', had his own tip tray and horse. 'Joe' would start very early in the morning, cleaning the main streets of the city, then go to Charleston Road, 'patching the tar works'. He very rarely spoke, but always did as instructed. Bendigo was a much smaller place then. Norm Harris first came across 'Joe' in 1963, when 'Joe' was an old man, but he still remembers him vividly when he saw 'Joe' starting his rounds. Norm believes the image shown with this article is of 'Silent Joe' working along Pall Mall and he would dearly like anyone reading this article to contact the Bendigo Historical Society should he or she know more about 'Silent Joe' including his real name.

The image with this article was one of the fine photographs taken by Alan Doney and shows 'Silent Joe' cleaning up along Pall Mall in the 1950s. It appears courtesy of Mike Butcher. Another of Doney's photos showing a similar scene in the 1950s from the Charing Cross end of Pall Mall, this one looking towards a FX Holden car, was featured in a 1986 Bendigo Advertiser supplement on Bendigo.

- Jim Evans in collaboration with Norm Harris