

Vale Jennifer Churchill



The late Jenny Churchill with her book *Great Thoroughbred Sires of the World*, published in 2006. Photo Virginia Harvey

By Club Member Virginia Harvey

It is of sad news I write my “Turf Tails” this month with news of the passing of my great friend Jennifer Churchill, aged 87, a legendary Thoroughbred journalist who became a pedigree authority, author and scribe, and a long-term member of the Australian Thoroughbred Breeders Club (ATBC).

Moving from Castle Hill to Kurrajong Heights in 1989 she joined the Club, not only for her love of Thoroughbreds and pedigrees, but for its social side, meeting and talking to like-minded people.

Jenny had an out-going and friendly nature and was always happy to lend her knowledge and advice when asked or if needed, and in earlier times was responsible for the Club’s newsletter.

Her culinary delights were also enjoyed by Club-Members another attribute that Jenny happily provided, regularly contributing to numerous ATBC festivities.

It was a time when Jenny – who had been editor of the Thoroughbreds section of *The Land* for about 13 years until 1990, decided to hand me the “long-reins” of Australia’s major rural weekly’s much read section. I owe my start to Jenny at *The Land* in its Thoroughbreds section, a section that I have been responsible for since – and which I re-named “Tails”.

I can recall the time when I first met Jenny in William Inglis and Son’s crowded refreshments-bar at its former Sydney headquarters of “Newmarket Stables” at Randwick; Jenny asking me “can you type”, and I replied “in a fashion”, and it all flowed on from that moment.

Jenny wanted to concentrate on other literary exploits, including pedigree building and analysis, as well as developing a national industry reference publication, *Stallions*.

Jenny’s column - “Under The Figtree”, took its name from William Inglis and Son’s memorable giant Morton Bay Fig tree – a famous fixture adjacent to its selling-ring at Randwick. Jenny frequented this place regularly as a journalist, industry administrator, owner and breeder.

From that Australian Easter Yearling Sale in 1990, I relocated myself to rent Jenny’s self-contained home-basement level at her Kurrajong Heights home, and from there our passion for Thoroughbreds were shared

with countless adventures. These included numerous and memorable country race meets and auction-sales, stud farms, and as well for a time regularly participating in the ATBC's annual bus trip over the June long-weekend.

It became a well-known fact, that Jenny and I – along with any other “coach-travellers” who wished to join us - would part-take in an early morning “departure” champagne at the back of the bus prior to hitting the Windsor Bridge when leaving about 7.00am on the Saturday morning from Barbara Robertson's nearby home at Mulgrave!

These trips – whether it be south to Victoria, an overnight trip to Queensland, or out west visiting the central districts – Jenny was ready for laughter and party-activities, which included the “Hanky Banister”, with lots of ice and a spot of water. Then there was the ATBC's trip to Western Australia and Tasmania, which also included a plane ride, and of course with some cheer, champagne and a good supply of Hanky Banister Scotch whisky on-board. Jenny and I also loved our regular jaunts to the far western hamlet of Louth for their annual race meeting, a trip she attended into her 80th year.



Thoroughbred pedigrees were Jenny's passion, and after winning a writing competition via renowned and late Sydney Morning Herald racing writer Bert Lillye, she paved her way for a long and successful Thoroughbred career from the 1960s.

Club members Ethne Potowski and Jenny Churchill, with committee members Tess Le Lievre and Jim Strachan at the Louth Races. Photo Virginia Harvey

Suffering the early death of her husband, Phillip, when living at Castle Hill, Jenny ploughed herself into earning a living.

She worked for well-known Thoroughbred journalist marvel, Brian Russell (now 90yo) at “Country Life” (which was later absorbed by The Land), as well as free-lancing for now defunct publications including Stud And Stable, Turf Monthly, and Racetrack.

With the help of her long-time friend and Club Member Ethne Potowski, Jenny operated a small stud at her castle hill property and stood her home-bred stallion Todhunter, the first horse to go to stud by the mighty Todman. She also bred a number of winners including the AJC Villiers Stakes winner Top Wing, and Grafton Horse of the Year, Sweet Portal.

As an author, Jenny combined with the team of The Australian Bloodhorse Review – now known as “Bluebloods”, to become the founding editor of Stallions, a vital annual national register of Thoroughbred sires since 1989, and was principle-co-editor of “Great Thoroughbred Sires of the World” published in 2006.

Jenny was also a member of Thoroughbred Breeders NSW for 50 years of which 19 were spent as a committee member, and from which she received two honours - “Services To The Breeding Industry”, and another “Outstanding Contribution to the NSW Thoroughbred Industry” awards.

Jenny belonged to the “old school” of literacy, and was most particular about her writings being conveyed in accurate English.

Her recent energies had been used on her next book “Great Thoroughbred Sires Of Australia and New Zealand”, and of which there is now an interim update volume - “The Modern Era”, 26 influential stallions documented, and this wonderful book is available via Bluebloods.

Jenny will be greatly missed. Jenny is survived by her 2 children Richard and Amanda.