A short history of the Condamine Bull Frog Bell:

In 1868, in the town of Condamine, a general blacksmith named Samuel Williams Jones became aware of the need for good quality bells with a far-carrying sound (necessary so that animals could be left to graze in open country). One day, a drover is said to have asked S. W. Jones to make a bell for his horse, and so, using a discarded pit-saw blade, S. W. Jones cut a bell-plate in the shape that he had been pondering for a while. He processed this bell-plate and fashioned it while hot into a bell which, when tuned to the correct pitch, had a distinctive 'knock' and was of clear tone. This bell created great interest among townspeople and teamsters alike, as the cast bells of similar size that they had been using previously were much quieter. In addition, the distinctive 'knock' of the new bell could be heard at a distance of some miles. Thus, the demand for this new design of bell (fashioned while hot instead of cast) grew quickly.

S. W. Jones soon became a well-established bell-smith. To produce bells with a clear, tuned note and a characteristic 'knock', S.W. Jones came to process the iron using only charcoal from selected timbers in his forge, and he developed a specially-prepared compound to use as the brazing material. The supply of pit-saw and cross-cut saw blades for making the bells quickly dwindled, so S. W. Jones had sheets of English Netherton iron of heavy and light gauges sent to Condamine from Brisbane. From this raw material, he made bells in sixteen graduated sizes for use on animals including bullocks, horses, sheep and goats. He named his bells "Bull Frog" bells, since the 'knock' of an iron "Bull Frog" bell resembled the boom of an old bullfrog from within a hollow log.

In 1878, S. W. Jones moved to Toowong, Brisbane, where he continued to make Condamine Bull Frog Bells. Then, in 1907, Alfred Ormand (my grandfather), already a skilled blacksmith and farrier, became S.W. Jones' assistant. From him, Alfred learnt the skills and secrets involved in making Jones' tuned stock bells with their far-carrying 'knock'. On his retirement in 1912, Mr Jones gave Alfred some of his tools, and all of his leftover materials. Even more importantly, S. W. Jones gave Alfred Ormand his endorsement to continue making the "Jones Condamine Bull Frog Bell".

Alfred Ormand had built a shed in his own backyard (also at Toowong), and in this shed he installed Jones' hand-operated metal guillotine, along with general tools for bell-making. For the next 57 years, Alfred continued the craft of bell making – starting with sheets of iron, cutting and shaping, using forge and anvil, until the end product was ready for use across Queensland. During and after World War II, the bells were made from steel as iron became scarce, and coke came to replace the charcoal previously used in the forge.

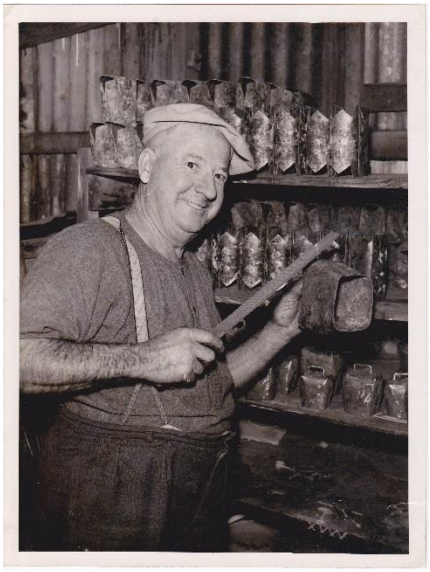
From 1946 until 1962, Alfred was assisted by his eldest son, James, and later, by his third son, Alfred Halliday Ormand. On Alfred Ormand's retirement in 1969, this younger son, A. H. Ormand, continued working making bells at the same forges and anvils. A. H. Ormand would continue making bells for another 30 odd years, in which time he reckoned he would have produced around 30,000 bells. My uncle, Alfred Halliday Ormand, passed away last year.

Further information about the history of the Condamine Bell can be found in "Bells of the Australian Bush" by Donald Cooney, and Paul and Eleanor Knie, published in 2008 by Jinglestix of Toowoomba, Queensland.

The Ormand bell-smithing shed and contents:

The main forge used by Alfred Ormand and his sons was manufactured out of an old water tank, and it still stands in the shed at Toowong, along with the blower, made by the "Buffalo Forge and Blower Co. of Buffalo, N.Y.". The building also houses a smaller forge, S.W. Jones' guillotine, anvils, vices, and tools used in bell-smithing. It even contains a stool made out of a tin drum covered in layers of hessian bags, which was long used by Alfred and his sons as they worked at the anvil shaping the bells. There is still some coke in a barrel in the shed, lengths of metal rods to make the bell tongues, some half-made bells, and various offcuts left after the last bell was made by A. H. Ormand in the early 2000s. Another guillotine, blower, bell shapes and some tools are stored under the home.

The shed itself, built in 1912, is about 10m x 3.7m in size, has a timber frame covered with galvanised iron sheeting and is situated in the sloping backyard of the old Ormand family home in Toowong. Large, double doors open out to the backyard on the northern side of the shed, and there are several simple prop-open windows on each side, allowing good ventilation when the smith was in use. The photographs were taken in April 2012, and give an idea of the layout.



Alfred Ormand (1888-1972) in his bell-smith's shed

Southern side and south-eastern end of the shed, built in 1912

The main forge in the north-western corner of the shed.

Blower at main forge

Smaller forge on northern wall

(L to R) main forge, vice, storage cupboard, small forge

Looking from western end (near main forge) towards eastern end of shed

South-western corner of shed showing large, double doors, a workbench, vices, storage shelves and lengths of metal rods for bell tongues.

Looking from eastern end of shed towards western end (one anvil and smaller forge shown in midfield)

Mid-section of shed (looking westwards)

S.W. Jones' guillotine in north-eastern corner of the shed.

Guillotine under family home

3 inch bell made by Alfred Halliday Ormand (1925-2013)