



Five buck cut: Peak Hill barber Cecil Titheradge at his Peak Hill shop last week

Picture: Sam Rutty

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By BRENDEN HILLS

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CECIL Titheradge, the barber of Peak Hill, has not missed a day behind his chair for 75 years — except for the brief interruptions of World War II and occasional holidays to Goulburn.

At 89, Cecil is still snipping and clipping, brushing off any thoughts of hanging up the scissors.

He has never had a sick day and, until last week, he wore a tie to work every day of his life.

The heatwave that struck western NSW forced him to loosen his collar, but only briefly.

"I'd be undressed, if I didn't have a tie on. I had to put it back on later because I was sick of not wearing it. I felt naked," he said.

When he began work at 14 in 1934, Joe Lyons was Prime Minister and Australia was still in the grips of the Great Depression.

He was taught the trade by his father, who opened a shop in the one-street-town, less than 100m from where Cecil still lives.

He has never worked anywhere else, although he had a four-year break to serve in the Middle East and Borneo in World War II.

Peak Hill's population was 1400 in 2006 and Cecil reckons he's given almost all of its men a haircut: "One bloke is 72 and I gave him his first. I don't think he's had a cut anywhere else, so he's been copping them from me for about 50 years."

There's little new in his shop. A faded 1995 calendar hangs in the window and 1920s sterilisation cabinets sit next to a jar of Brylcreem from "God only knows when".

Even the prices are a reminder of bygone days — \$5 per cut. Mr Titheradge even dropped his prices after misreading a GST notice in 2001: "We put it up from \$5 to \$5.50

to cover the 10 per cent, but we figured out if you didn't earn over a certain amount, you didn't have to pay the tax. We were well under that, so we knocked 50 cents off."

The bargain prices keep his customers coming back. "Where else can you get a haircut for five bucks?" Victor Hernandez, 43, said.

Cecil's wife, Joyce, opened a dress boutique next door 20 years ago and the two have broken for lunch at 1pm every day since.

Most days, Cecil can be found escaping the heat of his non-air-conditioned shop on a chair at the front door. The man is definitely a barber, not a hairdresser.

Yes, he is aware of the metrosexual revolution that spawned a wave of expensive haircuts for men and he doesn't think David Beckham's top is much chop. But he reckons he could handle it, all the same.

"It wouldn't be that hard to do.

He'd probably have a three up the side and a four on the top, then you'd trim around the edges and that'd be it," he said.

He doesn't like the modern mohawk, or faux-hawk, either.

"I told the first bloke that asked, 'I'll do it for you, but don't tell anyone you got it done here'. These days, I tell them to head to the ladies' (salon) down the road."

He doesn't see his job as an art: it's "something to keep me from having a punt more than I should".

He has a daily game of snooker and is still a champion player.

Decades ago, an opponent brandishing a top-line billiard cue challenged him to a game. Cecil accepted — and trounced him. His chosen cue? A broom handle.

Will he retire? "It goes through your mind every now and then, but I suppose I might pull the plug next year, if I can make it to 90."