

# An Interview with Enid Pettet

*Rosemary Phillis*

*The following interview was conducted with Mrs Pettet in July 1994.*

I was born in 1918 and was one of 9 children. My mother was born in 1880 and was one of the Shoular family. My father was one of the McDonalds.

I went to school at Riverstone for about 7 or 8 months, (when it was in the building that is now the Museum). I remember that the main hall was divided into two by a partition that they could draw back. The cloak room ran across the front of the building where the Masons built an entry foyer.

I was sent away to live with an aunt at North Sydney for a while, when my mother was ill. When I returned, (aged 10), my brothers and I were sent to school at Schofields as Mum didn't like the teacher at Riverstone. At that time we lived in Castlereagh Street and walked through the bush, across the creek and up past Wood's old place in Riverstone Road. We walked to school, rain, hail or shine.

One of my brothers was killed at Tobruk. Each of my brothers started work at the Meatworks. John worked out at the piggery where Abells were when he was 16 (he is 89 now, so around 1920). None of the girls worked at the Works.

I was told that when the Meatworks first started they killed the meat out near the creek on an area of concrete known as the 'stone wall'. They washed the meat with the creek water and then brought it back over the paddocks, (packed in ice) to the train to be taken to Sydney.

After the proper facilities were constructed at the Works this was no longer used, but the area at the creek became a popular swimming and fishing spot. You could catch beautiful perch there.

Cockroach Alley was where the first Meatworks houses were. There were two rows of houses, the front row ran down next to old Mr Vaughan's Shop and the Oddfellows Hall to where the Bowling Club is now. They were only slab buildings but they were good homes.

Reg Stanford lived in Cockroach Alley. He was a mutton butcher and he used to say that in the morning his apron was covered in cockroaches.

When William Angliss took over he had the new houses built in Butchers Row and eventually the other ones were demolished.

When the Cenotaph was unveiled in Riverstone, Mrs East organised a march for the Returned Soldiers. There was a brass band in the town at the time. Two other children and I were dressed as "Faith, Hope and Charity" and we led the parade up the street. Then we were all arranged around

the Cenotaph for the ceremony. After the ceremony we all came back to the village green and they had a carnival. We were all in the maypole dancing. It was a beautiful time.

In the days before there was anything where Marketown and the old RSL is now, this was the village green. It was all green grass up to the street behind. Beyond that was the Bootmaker and Miss Shirley's dressmaking shop. They used to set up a proper boxing ring on the green and you could hardly get on it for the people. It was in the late 1920s early 1930s that the shops were built on this area.

In those days it was pitch black at night, there were no street lights. I used to work in town (Sydney) and then go to the dances afterwards. My mother would come down at midnight to the station with a lantern to meet me.

During the drought Mum had to take all the washing down to the creek. The water was like mud, but you couldn't use your tank water for washing, it was for drinking. She would hang the clothes out on the bushes around the creek and we kids would play and usually end up in the water.

Then Mum and Dad built a well (which is still there). Father had problems keeping my brothers at home to help as their friends were always after them to come and play football. The well was 12 foot deep and very wide. (Where Laurie Doolan lives now was where our home was located, on the corner of Railway Terrace and Hunter Street.)

Pushbike races and horse races were held around the park. Before the park was there, along Garfield Road there were about six houses (including Fussell's). The houses in the street behind were all Meatworks houses. Then they built all those homes in Butchers Row.

My husband Claude drove a semi trailer during World War II. He took goods from the Meatworks to the City, unloaded, loaded up again and travelled back to Riverstone. He would then borrow Mr Leeson's car (Manger at the Works), drive home and have tea while his truck was unloaded and then loaded up at the Preserver. He'd then set off for the City again around 7 o'clock. He would get back to Riverstone around 12 o'clock and go to bed and then be up again at 6.30 the next day.

Dad's father used to talk of German Charlie, a German Doctor whose qualifications were not recognised here in Australia. They say he cured many people. He cut off half of Mr Bliss's face and correctly diagnosed non malignant cancer, saying that it wouldn't grow again and it didn't. (*Editor: we are not sure that German Charlie actually operated on people.*) I remember Dr Johnson as being a very good doctor.

Old Mrs Andrews used to take in boarders. She had a tennis court at the back of her place. They also took in boarders at the Royal Hotel. Ben Hibbert who was a porter on the railway boarded there. He was a huge man, 24 stone and he went through a couple of beds while he was there.

The local football matches were very popular. I remember Waxy going up and down the line all day while they were playing yelling "come on Riverstone". Mrs Britton used to trip the players with her umbrella if they ran too close to the side line. She would also hit any supporters for the opposition if they came too close.

Alice Voysey and my mother laid out the people who had died in the town. Alice would have made a good hospital matron. Mr Rosa measured up the bodies for the coffins.

There was a big bushfire through the area from Windsor Downs to the back of the Cemetery at Marsden Park, during the 1940s. The sky was red from the fire and smoke. Men from the Works helped to fight the fire. My husband took his own car and Mr Leeson gave him three chaps to go out afterwards and put down the cattle that had been burnt.

Paddy Morgan (known as Paddy King, the boxing champ) had the hotel then. He had two daughters, Perth and Margery. Margery's husband was the barman at the hotel.

Aub Gillespie was the AIF welterweight champ. He had a gymnasium in the town. He later had the Hire Cars. My husband was employed as a full time driver by Aub.

Dad's father spoke of the great flood where the water came up under the railway line near Church Street, back past the Masonic Hall and up to the foot of the Catholic Church hill. I think this was in the 1870s.

Claude Shoular was the boss of the loaders at the works. He used to work at night. My uncle, Tom Shoular had teams of draught horses and carted produce to and from Parramatta.

Where my family lived, the Fields were next door (also a big family) and then the Rosas, the street was almost wall-to-wall kids. The Rosas always built an Empire Day bonfire. They'd be building it for weeks before hand. When it was lit the whole town would light up and then the whole town came to the bonfire.

My brothers and the other kids couldn't afford crackers, so they would get rags soaked in kerosene and light them and throw them to each other over the paddocks. It took some burnt hands before they learnt that they should wear gloves to do this.

Old Mrs Steer started the C.W.A. in Riverstone, then she started the Younger Set. Nancy Fisher and I were among the first to join. I was about 16 or 17 at the time.

The C.W.A. held wonderful Balls. People would line up outside, watching everybody who came and looking at what they wore. Mrs East always had beautiful clothes (they used to own the hotel). Old Mr East was killed by a shunting goods wagon. He was totally deaf and didn't hear the train.

*Mr and Mrs Pettet left Riverstone in later years and went to live in Queensland.*