

Charlie Fisher

Clarrie Neal from information and notes provided by Nancy Hayden

Charles Edmond Fisher was born in 1882 in Ballarat, Victoria, one of seven children born to Edwin and Elizabeth. He was educated at Ballarat and with schooling completed he made his way across to Western Australia, working at various jobs throughout the state. He often worked on the land and always found it to be very satisfying.

As time went by, Charlie got a job in the mining industry and worked for several years at Meekatharra as an engine driver. He eventually left that industry and became an apprentice in the bakery trade. After receiving his certificate he moved to Perth to work as a baker.

It was in W.A. that he met his wife to be Alicia, who had come out from England in 1910 and lived with her sister until she found work. However the courtship was interrupted when World War 1 broke out and Charlie enlisted in the Imperial Camel Corps, later transferring to the 10th Light Horse Corps serving overseas in Turkey and other Middle East countries.

He was given his honorary discharge in 1919 and later in the year married Alicia. He was now ready to move on and came back to Victoria, settling in a small country town known as Eltham where he bought his first bakery. He was helped in this bakery by an apprentice, Jack Matthews, whom Charlie trained through to get his certificate.

It was in Eltham that their first three children were born - Roma, Bruce, and Nancy. It was also in Eltham that Charlie suffered severe burns to the body in a mishap while working in the bakery ovens. After his recovery he made up his mind to go to Double Bay, Sydney where he bought a bakery and pastrycook shop with residence. It was here in Double Bay that their fourth child, Alex was born.

The work in Double Bay wasn't easy by any means, after the baking he did the deliveries, often walking up three flights of stairs in flats to find that the customer didn't require any bread that day. In 1929 it appears that Charlie wanted a return to the country way of life so he decided to buy the bakery business of Mr Harold Wallace in Riverstone, including the home and the shop.

How he ever heard of this bakery business being for sale in Riverstone remains a mystery to the family, but it certainly came as a shock to them, after enjoying the comforts of Double Bay with the harbour, its electricity, water supply and the sewer, they came to Riverstone, a town with none of these amenities. The family had to wait until 1934 just to get the water and electricity.

Jack Matthews, their baker from Eltham, also made the move to Riverstone and lived in the home with the Fisher family for several years. As the business grew, it wasn't long before another apprentice, Alan Wallace, a son of the previous owner, was employed to learn the trade under Charlie, and stayed with the business until it was sold in 1953.

Charlie commenced his deliveries in Riverstone in a small way but it wasn't long before he had three carts delivering. As the business expanded he had a large sign erected across the top of the bakehouse /loading dock area that read 'On The Wings Of Progress'.

A horse and cart was used to make bread deliveries each weekday to the residents of Riverstone, Schofield's, and Marsden Park; and every Monday, Wednesday and Friday to Vineyards and Berkshire Park. There were no bread deliveries of a weekend, and somehow we all survived. The bread was taken from the cart and placed in a cane basket, covered with a canvas top for protection from the elements, for delivery to the householder.

Nancy recalled that it was her job to wash these canvas covers every Friday afternoon; the covers had to be scrubbed clean, then placed in the copper and boiled until they were white.

Some of the driver's names that many old residents would recall were - Wally Britton, Billy Schofield, Stewart Cummings, Ron Loveday, Lennie Dawson, Ross Smith, Joe Potter, Noel Waller, and Lennie Bolton, who was renowned for sleeping through the alarm. Charlie would often have to drive up to Lennie's place in Crown Road to get him out of bed.

It was always a sight to see these delivery horses doing their rounds; they would routinely stop at a house and as the baker came out they would move down to the next house and stop, or they would turn the corner and wait, without any directions from the driver.

Nancy remembers working in the bakery: *The bakehouse commenced baking at 2 am every week day. The bread was always ready for delivery at 8.0 am with the first stop being Conways to pick up the papers and magazines for delivery to the outlying homes. During the 1940s home delivery ceased to the outer areas and the papers and bread were then left at the local Post Office /store for collection by the residents. The bakers shop was the front of our home in Garfield Road, opposite the lane and the town's only bank at the time (the Commercial).*

Thursday was the day we baked buns, how the kids loved them, they would call in on their way to school. We buttered the buns and off the kids would go, sometimes it would be their breakfast. Other kids would call into the shop on their way home from school.

I wonder how many children of the day remember taking delivery of the bread from the cart and breaking it in halves to get the 'kissing crust', then pulling strips off it, how great it tasted, what a wonderful memory. In the winter time, Sunday was pie making day for the other shops and the canteen at the meatworks.

Nancy recalled the floods when Charlie, usually referred to as 'the boss' by all the staff, would always say "no one was to go hungry", and he did everything possible to ensure that the families over the creek and at Berkshire Park received their deliveries of bread.

Many a day when you thought there was enough bread, only to find there wasn't, a quick phone call was made to the surrounding bakeries of Moses in Windsor or Gillespies at Pitt Town for help. Everyone helped one another whenever they could, we were the only ones selling bread in the district, sliced bread was unheard of in those days.

During the war, with the rationing, hard times were experienced by the larger families and we had relief papers for people to sign and collect the allotted quantity of bread. Sometimes it was hard when their quota was used and they had to wait for the next issue, but we always managed to bake a little extra to tide them over, and somehow we all survived on the ration coupons (I wonder if we could today).

The baking ovens were kept going at all times, they were wood burners and a contractor was hired to split and cut the wood to the desired length for the fire box. Sometimes if the wood was green it was placed in the oven on a large tray during the weekend to dry out for better burning during the week. In summer it was very hot in the bakehouse but it was great in winter, a nice place to make us warm, and a great area for drying the washing during rainy days.

All the flour came by rail and Jess Goodwin's truck was used to transfer it from the railway yards to the bakehouse for storage in the flour room.

Charlie was always proud of his horses, ensuring they were well fed and shod. His pride and joy was the Clydesdale he owned for many years and used in the dray, he was known appropriately as 'Pride'. He sent the horses regularly to the town blacksmith Harry Williams to be shod, and if Harry was too busy he would shoe the horses himself.

The bread was delivered each Monday to Friday no matter how bad the weather, be it rain, hail, or shine, or stinking hot. The hot days always saw the drivers pleased to be finished so they could hose down the horses and give them a light feed and a drink. They had to be careful not to give the horses too much as they would develop 'colic' and have to be drenched to relieve the problem.

The horses remained in the stable yards until 4-30 pm when they were let out and crossed the railway line near the hotel, making their way along West Parade to the paddocks, picking at the grass as they went. Charlie would arrive some time later with their night feed, and in the winter time make sure the horses were properly rugged. He would return each morning at 6 am to bring the horses back to the bakehouse.

Many a time these good rugs were stolen during the night, which was very disappointing for Charlie, so he started using heavy bags that were cut and sewn together to make the rug; these rugs lasted much longer.

Charlie's stables were also home to several other ponies fondly remembered by many older residents of Riverstone, they were the ponies used by Eric Conway for his paper deliveries.

When Eric was away in the 2nd World War, his sister Mavis did the deliveries for more than four years. During the cold winter months Charlie would set up the sulky, wrapping two house-bricks that had been heated in the ovens in a bag for Mavis to keep her feet warm while doing the rounds.

Many families walked home through Charlie's paddocks, there were tracks everywhere. Nancy recalled the kids walking through in the winter time, often with no shoes. She also recalled the days as the horses crossed the railway line, if the gates were shut and there was a line of cars waiting, how the horses would move up to the front of the cars and squeeze in to make sure they were first through the gates.

Charlie grew all his own feed, corn, saccaline and lucerne for the horses, in his paddocks located along Carnarvon Road and Burfitt Road, down to Eastern Creek. Nancy recalled as children sitting down in the dray with Dad standing up driving with the reins, going out to the paddock to help with the harvesting. They would pick the corn, and then help load it when it was cut.

When the hay harvest was ready, Charlie and Fred Cassell would be out there for hours with the harvester, pulled by the Clydesdales, cutting and binding the hay into sheafs. The sheafs were loaded onto the lorry owned and driven by Jess Goodwin for transfer back to the bakehouse, where it was thrown and stacked in a huge hay shed.

Nancy loved to see the men throw the sheafs up high using the pitch fork when they were stacking. In later years Charlie put in a chaffcutter that he was able to operate from the motor of the dough maker, when that was not in use. Charlie also owned the clay pit in Burfitt Rd for many years, a previous owner was the legendary Lance Skuthorpe.

Nancy recalled the trotting track that was located in the meatworks paddocks opposite the railway station, and how it was always in use by the trotting fraternity. In the 1940s a new track was laid on the opposite side of Garfield Road, around the football oval, They paid two shillings and sixpence to use the track, and there were that many trotters that they often used a water truck to lay the dust. No wonder Harry Williams the town blacksmith was such a busy man.

At a meeting held by the Riverstone Progress Association in 1935 it was decided to form a committee to run their own Agricultural Show. There was also a ladies committee formed to run the craft and cooking sections. The first show was held in 1936, and then held annually until the outbreak of the 2nd World War forced their cancellation.

Charlie Fisher was the driving force behind the formation of the show society, becoming its President for many years and was made a life member. He served many years as the President of the Riverstone Progress Association and also served several years as a Councillor on the Blacktown Council representing the Riverstone district. In his early days he was an active member of the Master Bakers Board. He was an original member of the Riverstone-Schofields RSL Sub-branch and when the RSL Club was formed he was appointed as its first Trustee.

He was a wonderful man and did much for the community of Riverstone, he can certainly be proud of his many achievements.

Nancy always remembers her father for his kind heart, recalling the days he would bring 'Jockey' Stevens back to the bakery change rooms. 'Jockey' was a down and out type who used to sleep in the paddock opposite the railway station, sometimes under a sheet of iron, and sometimes under a newspaper. He was a returned digger from the 1st World War and was required to report to the Dept. of Veterans Affairs every three months.

Charlie would give 'Jockey' a shower, shave him, give him a haircut, sometimes using the horse shears, fit him out in a suit that had been provided by the RSL sub branch, then put him on the train to Sydney. When he returned home he was given some fresh clothes or his old clothes were returned to him, and the suit was stored in a locker at the bakehouse until the next time. It had to be done this way because 'Jockey' would ruin the suit the first night he returned.

Nancy also recalled Charlie bringing home a skinny, mangy, stray dog off the street that nobody wanted, he bathed it and gave it a haircut. Every day it was treated with the sulphur and carbolic oil treatment used on the horses and it soon became a lovely terrier and was found a nice home.

Tommy McNamara recalled the day he asked Charlie if he would sell him a small sulky to allow his mother to get to Jack Abell's place in South Street, Marsden Park where she worked one day a week to help support her young family. Charlie asked Tommy if he thought two pounds was too much to pay. Tommy said he had the two pounds so Charlie gave him the sulky, and also all the harness and gear that went with it. Tommy said it was a beautiful hickory sulky and the pony used to pull it was the one the McNamara children had learnt to ride on.

Charlie was sad to leave his bakery but failing health forced his retirement. The bakery and house were sold to a Bill Bamford in 1953 and the family moved from the shop to Crown Road. During retirement Charlie took up bowls and became a member of the Windsor Bowling Club, Riverstone Bowling Club being formed a few years later.

In 1959 he made a trip to Western Australia; he was never to return as illness forced him to enter the Perth hospital, where he passed away. Charlie's wife Alicia passed away in 1964; both were cremated at the Northern Suburbs Crematorium.

Of the family, Roma managed the ladies hairdressing shop next door to Dick Stacey's fruit shop. Bruce became an electrician, working at Blacktown Council for several years before becoming a draughtsman with Parramatta Council, he now lives in Queensland. Alex worked in the bakehouse for many years, before opting to do the deliveries.

Nancy left school at 15 owing to her mother's illness, spending the first year learning the book-keeping and then working in the shop. Like her father, Nancy has been a wonderful worker for the community, an active member of the CWA, serving many years as their Secretary and President, and being involved with Meals on Wheels for some 30 years. She has been a member of the Hawkesbury Show Ladies Auxiliary for more than 20 years, and been Social Secretary of Hawkesbury Legacy for 15 years.