

Mavis Lane & Doreen Ross OAM

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Foreword: In 1998 the second annual Journal produced by the Historical Society contained articles on Sam Lane and the Riverstone Bicycle Club, formed in 1901, of which Sam's father, George, was the first Captain. Much of the remainder of the Journal was devoted to some 20 extracts from the letters Sam wrote for the local papers, the "Riverstone Press" and the "Blacktown Guardian".

Sam's love of Riverstone and its history was infectious and his community minded spirit was mirrored by his wife, Mavis, and daughter, Doreen, who both, sadly, passed away in 2010. With information kindly supplied by Laurie and Carmel Lane, Trevor Ross and Wendy Graham we would like to pay tribute to these two special ladies.



Mavis Lane seated, with daughters Doreen and Ruth at the Museum in 2001.

Photo: Rosemary Phillis

Mavis Lane

Mavis Butterworth was born in Rockdale on 17th December, 1911 into "a united happy family". (Mavis's memories of living through the Depression make good reading so the Historical Society has made a booklet containing hers, Doreen's and Sam's fuller stories). Mavis began her schooling at St. Joseph's Catholic School in Rockdale. In those days Protestant children could attend a Catholic school but did not need to attend religious instruction classes. She and her younger brother, Owen, later transferred to Rockdale Public School, which was much closer to home and did not require a walk through town and across the railway line.

From Rockdale, when Mavis was about 11 years of age, the family moved from their rented home (not many people in those days owned their own homes) to Kogarah and Arncliffe. She later attended Kogarah Domestic School to do a Commercial Course which also involved cooking. The main subjects of her final year were shorthand, typing, business principles and bookkeeping. She passed her final exams after three years and went to work in the city, firstly in the office of J. M. Dempster Retail

Jewellers, later as a steno/typist at R. G. Dun & Co. Mercantile Agents and Debt Collectors. By this time the Depression had really set in and R.G. Dun “rationalised” and Mavis was one of many who had to go.

In 1934 Mavis, as a member of the St. George Ambulance Rockdale Division Social Group, was a candidate in a queen competition. A friend of Mavis was engaged to a chap who worked with Cecil Rhodes (Sam) Lane. Sam was invited to one of the group’s fund-raising dances. Mavis and Sam met and some weeks later at the competition crowning Sam turned up again “and that’s how things started”!

In August 1935 Mavis and Sam married and came to live in Schofields. They had two acres of land in Station (now Bridge) Street and £200 and were determined not to go into debt. With their two hundred pounds they paid their building fees and, with the paid assistance of two carpenter friends, doing only weekend work, they built a two roomed house with a part-enclosed verandah and bathroom. Second-hand furniture (from Old Ark Furniture Store on Broadway, Sydney, near Grace Bros.) and Conoleum Lino squares on the floor made Mavis’s move from “the City Lights to Schofields” complete and she commented, “I have no recollection of being bored with my new life”. Sam left for work in the city on the 5:40am train and returned on the 6:45pm train. Mavis played tennis through the week and they both played at weekends.

George, their first child was born in July 1936 at Ennisluhan Private Hospital (Sister Barnes’) in Garfield Road, Riverstone (now Drs. Dixon and Longworth’s surgeries). When Sam’s work in the city closed down he found work at the Meatworks being able to do so because he “knew” somebody and was willing to take any sort of work. Their children to follow George were Ruth 1938, Doreen 1941, Miriam 1943, Lyn 1946 and Laurie 1948. Mavis’s community life began with the Schofields Public School’s P & C, its Committee and Canteen and many fund-raising groups.

In 1948, at age 12, George was stricken with Rheumatoid Arthritis and was admitted to the Children’s Hospital at Camperdown where he was to spend the remaining nine years of his life. With visits only allowed on Sundays, and children not allowed at all, Mavis and Sam spent their Sundays travelling by steam train and then by tram to visit George. On special occasions they would take their other children to see George from the lawn outside his window. Later George was moved to a small room of his own so they could visit during the week.

George must have inherited his mother’s strength of character. He endured times of great suffering but was only once heard to complain. Professor Lorimor Dodds was his doctor, but also his friend. He made many friends from all walks of life, the sporting fraternity especially. His 21st birthday party in his special bed saw people coming and going all day and telegrams galore. Eventually he lost his sight and hearing. Before his hearing went he learned Braille. Therapists gave George lessons whereby the family could communicate with him by writing on his chest or hands. The family read books to him in this way, including Douglas Bader’s “Reach to the Sky”.

With George’s passing and her children growing, Mavis was able to do something she had vowed never to do, become a white leghorn, as Lady Bowlers were known at that time. Mavis was eventually to become a Life Member of the Riverstone Bowling Club, an honour she cherished dearly. Mavis also was made a Life Member of the Riverstone Senior Citizens’ and had much pride when the Sam Lane Community Centre, incorporating the Senior Citizens hall, opened in 1982.

After Sam's death in 1986 Mavis continued her community involvement. Amongst the Awards she was to receive for her community service were the Blacktown Council Senior Citizen of the Year Award and the NSW Premier's Award. In 1997, when the Riverstone & District Historical Society was reformed, Mavis, at the age of 86, became its most senior member.



Riverstone Women's Bowls group. Mavis Lane is second from the left.

Photo: Mary Buerkner collection.

About five years before her death, on 23rd October, 2010 aged 98, Mavis decided it was time she gave thought to living in an aged care facility. The opportunity came along for her to go into the Fitzgerald Aged Care facility at Windsor. Laurie recalls, "from the first information night with the Fitzgerald staff Mum was like a duck to water and for the next five years she had a wonderful life in their care."

The celebration of Mavis's life at an overflowing Senior Citizens' hall heard Laurie's comment "her best achievement was that of being Mother, Grandmother and Great Grandmother" and his son Nicholas's "We thank Grandma for instilling so much love, wisdom and inspiration into our lives that we may pass this on to our children".

Doreen Ross

Doreen, the third child of Sam and Mavis Lane was born on 24th March 1941 at Sister Barnes' Private Hospital, Riverstone. She attended Schofields Primary School and completed her schooling at Richmond Rural (now High) School. Childhood days were simple but happy ones, typical of that era, playing with the local kids, hopscotch, skipping, cricket, lots of walking, sometimes as far as the creek, which was frowned on by Mavis and Sam who were afraid they might fall in. The Schofields area in those days was mostly farming, mainly poultry and dairy.

With a dairy close by when Doreen was about ten, the dairy began to give her baby calves the mothers had abandoned to take home and feed. The calves would be returned to the dairy when they were ready. Opposite the Lane's property lived a widow, Jessie Poeffer, whose husband had been killed in WWII. Behind her place was a fellow living in a caravan. He worked Sam's land, growing beans and turnips. Doreen helped by pulling up turnips. After George went into hospital Doreen took his place as Sam's

helper, doing tasks such as concreting and fencing. These factors may have been the catalyst for her wish to be a farmer when she left school. It did not become a reality.

At 15 she completed a typing course at Sydney's Metropolitan Business College and then went to work in the city at H. Rowe and Co. Going to work by steam train had its advantages. The box carriages made the nightly return trip seem like party night, travelling with kids with whom you had gone to school and meeting up with other teenagers from Quakers Hill.

Teenage years were happy ones. Tennis at Brownings' Argowan Road court on Saturdays and Sundays was a regular pastime. Brownings were poultry farmers. They turned one of their brooder sheds into a hall, fitted it out with table tennis and billiard tables so Saturday nights would be party nights there. Saturday night visits to the pictures in Riverstone were also popular, with a group walking home together. A really special night would be a train trip to the Richmond theatre. Riding push bikes to Quakers Hill, where the boys flew model airplanes that had to be kick started by the propeller and held by a piece of string, usually meant lots of fun and also a cut finger or two from the sharp propeller. There was also some motorbike riding on an old poultry farm at Quakers Hill (at first unbeknownst to Sam and Mavis). Doreen was later to own an AJS motorbike.

It was at H. Rowe & Co. that she met her future husband, Ernie Ross. Ernie lived at Mascot and it soon became obvious to him that, as Doreen recalled, "...it was cheaper to marry me than to visit, as coming to Schofields was the pits". Doreen and Ernie married in 1959 and also settled in Bridge Street Schofields where they raised three children, Wendy, 1960, Trevor 1962 and Glenn 1965. Sadly Glenn was killed in an accident in 1983. Trevor married and has four sons, twins Adam and Aaron, Dean and Mark and Wendy married and has one son, Kieren.

Doreen's community work, apart from working for her children's schools on canteen and P. & Cs., began when she joined the Schofields' Bushfire Brigade in the 1960s and persuaded Ernie to also join. Ernie was to have many roles with the Brigade, including a time as Captain, whilst Doreen was Secretary on a number of occasions. She was awarded the National Medal with two clasps for Diligent Service to Schofields Bushfire Brigade and was posthumously awarded a Long Service Medal for 40 years service by the NSW Rural Fire Service.



1972 Photograph from the *Blacktown Advocate* of Lennie Taber (standing) and Doreen Ross.



1978 Schofields Bushfire brigade. Sam Lane, Doreen and Ernie Ross are in the front row.

Photo: Doreen Ross Collection.

In the 1970s, with help from fellow Brigade members, she instigated the Christmas Eve Santa drive. To Doreen's delight in 2009 the Brigade constructed two sleighs to transport Santa and his helpers around the town. One was named after Doreen and the other after Ernie.

The first Riverstone Swimming Pool opened in 1972. Trevor and Wendy recall, "Mum only learned to swim when in her 20s, and from that day on, she was hooked. Once she found the joy of Learn to Swim, she decided that she would begin to teach swimming. ...During her 40 years of teaching she would have taught well over 4000 people. ...She not only taught kids and adults to swim, she also taught instructors. ...At times she was teaching second and third generation children". Doreen was made a Life Member of both Riverstone Swimming Clubs. She also participated as a Volunteer at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

When the Sam Lane Community Complex opened in 1982 Doreen became a voluntary worker for the Riverstone Neighbourhood Centre and continued in that capacity for 30 years. Also in 1982 Doreen began working, as a Library Clerical Assistant, at St. John's Primary School. This was a part-time position that depended on Government funding being available, which was not always the case, but Doreen was still working there at the time of her death.

She and Ernie became members of the Riverstone & District Historical Society when it reformed in the mid 1990s and Doreen was a valuable source of information about Schofields for the Society. The Society held Doreen in such esteem that it joined others in recommending to Blacktown City Council, following her death in 2010, that the Riverstone Swimming Pool be renamed the "Doreen Ross OAM

Memorial Pool". Blacktown sent the application to the NSW State Names Board, but no more was heard of the suggestion. Doreen was also a Life member of the Friends of Knudsen Reserve.

Her community work was to see her contributions to the community recognised when she was awarded an OAM in January 2001. Her comments were, "...to be recognised by your peers, well, it's a great honour. I'm pretty chuffed about it. ...Helping the community is just something you do, you know. ...I really enjoy it...and, if someone benefits out of it – well, terrific."

At an interview Doreen did with Rosemary Phillis, in 2006, she was looking to the future for Schofields when she commented, "What concerns me most is that the beautiful stands of trees will go. Where the pole depot is, there is a natural spring runs where all those little trees are. I hope that they don't go. It would make a nice little park. There are some lovely she oaks that should be preserved".

After an illness, which saw him confined to a wheelchair in the later years, Ernie passed away in February 2007. At the time of her death on 17th March 2010 Doreen was an active member of the Riverstone Bicentennial Committee. She and Mavis attended the first Bicentennial celebration, the Official Opening of the Museum's Extensions, on 7th February that year. Doreen's funeral was attended by a massive crowd of people who had come to honour and thank a lady who did so much in her lifetime for the Schofields/Riverstone community.

At the 2010 Sports Awards at the Riverstone/ Schofields Memorial Club in May that year Trevor and Wendy were invited to present the Junior Sportsperson of the Year Award, which had been renamed the Doreen Ross Award. They commented, "We can honestly tell you that was she here tonight, she would be asking what she had done to deserve this recognition. But we know that she would be extremely proud and humbled to be recognised in this manner."



2001. Doreen wearing her Order of Australia medal with some of her family at the Riverstone Festival.

Photo: Rosemary Phillis