

## Memories of Riverstone in the 1930s

*Betty Hope*

Growing up in Riverstone in the 30s, the eldest of 10 children born to Thelma and Claude Schofield, there were times when I regarded the 'No. 1 Spot' as not so lucky. My maternal instincts being tested at a very early age, whether it would be rocking the Pram, dipping the Dummy in glycerine or honey or carrying the Baby to the Butcher's Shop for a walk and arriving home with the meat atop the Bunny Rug.

Our Brick House was centred in a large 'Paddock', bounded by Pitt, Market & Mill Streets & Railway Pde. There was one other house in the paddock, owned by Mrs Edwards. My Father worked for Taylors' Produce Co. (later known as Stockman's), which was virtually over the road from our home.

The "Paddock" served as a huge playground- complete with goal posts for Football, a Cricket Pitch and a creek which flooded after heavy rain when it became more like a lake. Cray fishing was a popular pastime -a small piece of meat tied to a string line was the bait. After carefully releasing the sharp claws we would then throw the crayfish back into the creek, only to catch them all over again. A Jersey cow and a horse called *Stripey* also shared our paddock. One form of punishment for a wrong doing was "Go and gather a bag of manure"- not only did the garden benefit -it saved a lot of slipping and sliding when one was in fear of being "run out" in cricket or scoring a goal in football.

In a strange coincidence the former Paddock and Creek where *so* much activity and sport took place is now unrecognisable -buried beneath the Riverstone Bowling Club -a fitting tribute to the many youngsters who derived so much pleasure from the Paddock.

*Stripey* was a small flighty white horse who would side step or baulk at the smallest puddle or unusual object in his sight. Sunday afternoon was drive time. *Stripey* would be harnessed to the Bottle Green Sulky and after a couple of laps of the block to settle him down then and only then would it be safe for the passengers to board. Those who couldn't fit on the seat sat on the floor.

For many years my prized possession was a Red Ribbon won with *Stripey* at the Riverstone Show. The Showground was adjacent to the one and only Butcher's Shop in the town. The mere fact that only two contestants participated in the event did not embarrass me at all, I was proud that *Stripey* and I had come 2nd and that was that.

Beagle Dogs were kept for rabbiting excursions. At one stage two were named Jack and Jill A box of smelly Ferrets, a couple of Shot Guns, Beagle3 running behind, *Stripey* pulling the sulky, my father holding the reins, destination Berkshire Park, was not an uncommon sight. Baked and seasoned with herbs and bacon the rabbits proved good eating.

Vegetables were always plentiful at home. It would be the 'in thing' among relatives and neighbours to see who could produce the first ripe tomatoes of the Season. We had a big vegetable garden, fowls, pig and a cow for milk, cream and butter. Large blocks of ice were our means of keeping milk, cream, butter etc fresh. I can tell you it was a battle during hot Riverstone summers. In Autumn, when Mushrooms were plentiful after rain, we'd walk miles before school collecting them and Mum would cook them for breakfast.

Bread was delivered by way of a horse and cart. [It wasn't unusual for the Bread to have quite a hole down the centre of the loaf, made by a 'Phantom Youngster' on the short journey from the back gate to the house. Approaching the Christmas season I'd be sent to Charlie Fishers' Bakery for "3 penneth of Yeast and don't mention what it's for." Making 'Home Brew' was illegal in those days.

Milk was sold by the Billy Can, (we never needed a Milkman). A Butcher would call at my Grandmother's house (still there) in Garfield Road just past the Catholic Church. On Sunday an 'Ice Cream Man', Mr Visocchi from Marsden Park, would drive around in a horse and cart selling his home-made Ice Cream.

Family Picnics were always spent near the water, whether it be Mitchell Park on the Hawkesbury River, North Richmond, Yarrarundi or the Nepean at Penrith, they were all enjoyable. Woy Woy where my Grandmother owned a Holiday Cottage was our destination for annual holidays. Friends, relatives, boxes of food and drink made up the load atop Taylors 3 tonne Table Top Truck.

The Riverstone Meatworks was situated well within 'smelling range' of our home! Each weekday a long contingent of men -four abreast, would alight from the 6.45a.m. train from Sydney, making their way to the Meatworks. At 4.15p.m. the 'Trek' would be reversed by catching the train back home to the City and Suburbs. Many locals including brothers, uncles and cousins were employed by Riverstone's largest industry. There was a sense of pride to see the huge delivery trucks with *Riverstone-Imperial* painted on the side. The sight of men in Sou'wester caps and capes over their shoulders delivering carcasses covered in unbleached Mutton Bags was not uncommon.

In 1946, after I was discharged from the Australian Womens Army Service (A.W.A.S.), I was employed as a Cashier at the Butcher's shop, in Garfield Rd, just over the Railway Line, working with Sid Jarrett, Jim Mawson and Arthur?

Conway's Newsagency was there as long as I can remember. It was run by Eric and his mother upon the death of his father. As well as always being well groomed Eric possessed a very pleasant manner. He also played the piano beautifully.

Ossie Robbins conducted the Barber Shop at the rear of the Newsagency. Conversation and constant snipping of scissors had a relaxed atmosphere. My hairstyle never altered, 'Short Bob', centre parting with a fringe. My brothers weren't so lucky, Father cut their hair, a good close cut lasted longer, often regarded as a blessing, especially when the clippers were blunt or needed oiling.

Beside the shop and opposite the Railway Station was a grassed area we called *Conway's Green*. It was here that the Circus used to perform when it came to Riverstone. Trucks, trailers, caravans, animals would arrive. Then came the setting up, raising the big tent, the Merry Go Round, Chair-o-plane etc plus 2 very high poles with many wires to keep the Tight Rope taut for Blondie to perform the fine and very nail biting act of the evening. She would walk the very high wire, carrying a long pole for balance. I can't remember the safety net ever being used.

On the corner of Railway Pde & Market St stood a Grocery store worked by Lionel McCutcheon & Ted Vaughan. (See photo below.) Those were the days when a bag of boiled lollies would be included in the weekly grocery order, as much as to say "thank you for your custom". Ted Vaughan was also a Sunday School teacher at St. Paul's Church. He was a kindly man, who at one time worked with me at Rosenthals, after I took over from cousin Mary. My sister Shirley later filled my shoes.

The Oddfellows Hall was situated in Railway Pde, practically opposite Taylors Produce Co. It was the meeting place for the unemployed during the Depression. Concerts, dance classes and at one time Mr and Mrs Osborne conducted a *Sunshine Circle*, a wonderful reprieve for Mothers with large families like ours. At the back of the Oddfellows Hall there were more timber terraces we called *Cockroach Alley* -they were in a derelict condition for many years.

Shops and businesses were the only people to have the Telephone. Telegrams were our fast means of communication -delivered from the Post Office by a Telegram Boy, who rode a Push Bike. A Battery Wireless was a Luxury, all work and noise would cease when Dad & *Dave* -from *Snake Gully* would come on. The *Aeroplane Jelly* Song was also a favourite.

The Picture Show in Garfield Road was owned by Mr Murrell. A Saturday afternoon Matinee costing sixpence for admission was the highlight of the week, even though at first the pictures were Silent and Black and White. The extent of our viewing was the occasional Charlie Chaplin movie, Westerns, Humorous films and Romances with a Tom Mix serial to bring you back next week. Frankenstein would be shown in the evening only when the adults attended. On the stage of the theatre stood a piano which was played by Miss Murrell at Interval. Words appeared on the screen, with a 'bouncing ball' connecting the words to the tune.

The theatre was not only used for movies. Being the largest hall in the town it was the scene for many 'Balls'. There was a supper room behind the Theatre. One big occasion was to celebrate the 'switching on of electricity in Riverstone'. When the electricity came there were great Celebrations, as when water was 'laid on', -41the streets were messy from digging, there were not too many tarred roads in Riverstone those days.

Another big event held at the theatre was the crowning of the *Queen of Riverstone Competition* which was won by Nancy Strachan.

Our Primary School held the annual prize giving and concert at the Theatre. *Mice Blue Gown* was one popular item I remember singing. We were dressed in Blue Gowns and bonnets and probably thought we were all 'Alice Fayes'. The maypole was usually the closing event of the evening. Young girls dressed in pretty pastels holding a ribbon to match, danced around the maypole, plaiting and weaving as they danced, finally reversing back to the beginning.

The Masonic Hall holds very happy memories of my teen years, where many learnt to dance, babies slept on the stage near the Band, while a Euchre tournament progressed in the Back Room. Helping with the sandwiches for Supper, setting out cups and saucers and preparing the dance floor with the aid of kerosene/sawdust worked in with a corn bag nailed to a stick which made it as Fast as an Ice Skating Rink was a 'must' prior to our monthly dance.

Dick Stacey (Snr) on Piano, Chummy Greenhalgh on Drums and someone playing the Saxophone usually made up the band. The McCarthys', Eileen, Kate and Patsy were excellent doing the *Jive*. After much pleading, Henry Cook would sing the *Maori Farewell*, while we danced *The Medley* closing dance of the evening.

Chips Rafferty the Film Star from movies *40,000 Horsemen* and others, was based at R.A.A.F. Richmond during the War years and often came to our dances. It was an honour to have a film star in our midst.

Now in the Twilight Years of Life, one has moments to reflect back to days when once the security of the Home and Family were the most important things in life -I never dreamt that one day I would be recording such events, as at the time they appeared to be normal routine. I still keep in touch with friends from Primary School and Wartime days, in fact life is like a rolling stone, it gathers friends on its way! There will always be a 'soft spot' in my heart for Riverstone, my birthplace.