

Memories of Royal Hotel Riverstone

Heather Smith (nee Watson)

It was probably about 1942 that my Mother, Margery Watson and my two younger sisters Nevis and Sue and I first lived at the Royal Hotel, Riverstone. My father George Watson was in the Army in the 2nd World War and my mother's parents Mary and William Morgan (aka Paddy King) were the licencees of the hotel.

The hotel was situated on the corner of Garfield Road, and Railway Parade (now called West Parade), the site is now a car park. At the rear of the back yard where a car sale yard and mechanics now stands was Mr Williams the Blacksmith's shop.

The hotel was a two-storey building with a verandah across the front and down the side facing Garfield Road. It was actually built over a creek and the foundations were three connecting cellars. The first cellar was reached from a trap-door in the floor of the bar and the barrels of beer were kept there. They were rolled down from the street level through a door which faced to the front. This was after they had been delivered by the brewery truck which was driven by Mr Syd. Muston and later by his son Arthur. The second cellar was damper and it was in here that the spirits, i.e., rum, brandy, whisky etc. was stored in bottles. The final cellar was always very damp with pumps working most of the time to keep the water at bay.

The bar of the hotel was a horse-shoe shaped counter with large handles which the barmaids and barmen pulled down and this opened the taps which filled the glasses with beer. They were very adept at this and never seemed to spill a drop. The trays beneath the taps always had a purple dye in them so that the beer slops could not be re-used. The bar was packed every afternoon from 3pm to 6pm closing time as the meat workers finished their shifts and came in for a drink before catching their train home. The trains were all steam trains and at the end of the platform near the hotel there was a large water tower where the steam engines filled up. The drinkers could time their run to the last second to catch the train.

My aunt Perth Morgan sat behind the cash register in the middle of the bar on a small raised platform with a waist high wall around it and she was responsible for handing the correct change to the barmen/women. They would slap the coins onto the top of the wall, shout out how many drinks had been served and she would hand back the correct change. It was a constant source of amazement to everybody as she managed to do this accurately whilst continuing on with the cryptic crossword from the Sydney Morning Herald. The noise in the bar between those hours was deafening (the 6 o'clock swill historians now call it) and at 6.00pm we children were allowed to bring the gong from the dining room to the rear door of the bar and bang on it to signify closing time.

There were several rooms leading from the rear of the bar, one was known as the Ladies Parlour but I don't think I ever saw a lady drinking in there. The other room was the back Parlour and it was here that the Police Sgt., the Meatworks Manager and often the Bank Manager who I guess did not want to mix with the workers, came for their drink of an afternoon.

The side entrance to the Hotel for guests and family was known as the Private entrance and this faced Garfield Road, the door opened onto a passage way which led to a two-tiered staircase leading to the second storey and the bedrooms. Beneath the staircase was a tiny room known as the storeroom and it was here that during the War cigarettes and tobacco were doled out to smokers. Because they were rationed they were in desperately short supply. When I attended Riverstone school many was the time a desperate teacher would take me aside to ask if I could obtain a few 'ciggies' from Grandfather. However, still downstairs, Grandfather's office was located on the right; it contained a very large safe, a desk and a wall telephone. The phone number was Riverstone 9 and we had to stand on a chair to speak as the phone was mounted on the wall. It was a large wooden affair with a speaker on the front which we shouted into and a handpiece which you held up to your ear.

The next room was the most impressive room of the whole hotel, it was the dining room and ran across the full length of the building from Garfield Road, to the yard at the side of the hotel. It contained three highly polished eight-seater tables. One each end and one in the middle. I rarely saw these tables without the covering of stiffly starched white tablecloths and the full complement of polished silver cutlery, serviette rings and cruet sets. In the middle of the wall was a large brick fireplace flanked on one side by a magnificent chiffonier topped with an ornate mirror. On the other side were the heavy swinging doors which led to the kitchen.

Once through the doors there was the servant's eating area and then the main kitchen with one wall being taken up with a large fuel stove as well as two large preparation tables and a sink in the corner. There were also two walk-in pantries one for food and the other for plates and cooking utensils. The back door led to the laundry and the ironing room. In the 40s the washing was boiled up in a large copper and hung out on clothes lines which ran the full length of the yard at the rear of the hotel. There was also a well in the side yard under the pantry window and one at the rear of the building. If my memory serves me correctly there was also a vegetable garden in the back yard. Across the back there was a paddock with stables. My sisters and I had a pony and my grandfather also had a large grey horse which he and my Auntie would ride.

My grandparents had staff who were very loyal to them and had come with them from hotel to hotel. There was Jimmy the barman who had been a jockey, Ned the yardman who cleaned up around the outside of the hotel and hosed down the pavements and bar floor and also looked after the vegetable garden and chopped the wood. Mary the cook who turned out three hot meals a day, seven days a week for all the family, staff and boarders as well as a profusion of family visitors and friends at the week-end. Elsie and Edna were housemaids and barmaids. They set and waited on the tables, made the beds and dusted the rooms then rested for two hours and commenced working in the bar from 3pm-6pm.

There were many other staff, mainly locals who helped in the bar, assisted with the laundry and ironing as well as the washing up and cooking and polishing the floors which were all heavy brown linoleum. My Auntie Pertha also worked as Cashier in the bar and my Mother was expected to help out wherever necessary.

Upstairs were all the bedrooms, bathrooms and sitting room. Hotels in those days especially in country towns always had boarders. These were usually Bank Managers or young bank clerks, school teachers, heads of departments from the Meatworks and during the War many Officers from the American Army stayed there, as they were supervising the manufacture of powdered eggs at the meatworks.

The area was divided in halves by a long passageway with bedrooms either side. At the rear end of the passageway there were two bathrooms one for females and one for males. We had septic toilets and electric hot water systems. These were small boxes mounted onto the wall and the switch was pulled down to start the hot water supply. The supply could be quite tricky as sometimes the water was boiling and other times barely warm. There was another smaller bathroom and toilet just past the stairs but this was only ever used by my grandparents and sometimes by my Aunt.

All the bedrooms that faced onto the balcony had french doors opening out onto them. This was great in the summertime as they could be opened to let in the breezes, however the mosquitos were a problem and we always had big mosquito nets over our beds.

My grandparent's bedroom was at the front of the hotel facing onto Railway Parade and was entered through a room known as the sleepout. It was here that each morning the money from the previous days bar takings was counted and rolled in brown paper wrappers. When the necessary bookwork was completed, the money and books were placed into a calico bag and if it was school holidays we were allowed to walk up to the Commercial Banking Company, with either Grandma or Grandpa to bank the takings.

The bar of the hotel was opened from 10.00am to 6.00pm on Monday to Friday and from 9.00am to 12 o'clock on Saturday. We did not open on a Sunday.

There are quite a few characters who come to memory - there was 'Jockey' Stevens an absolute chronic alcoholic who slept in the vacant paddock which was next door to Conway's Newsagency. During the winter the local police officer used to arrest him for vagrancy so he would have somewhere to sleep on cold nights. Sometimes however, he would turn up on the hotel doorstep of a morning with the frost on his cap and overcoat.

There was 'Poppie' who seemed to be a local villain and the Police were always looking for him. He belied his name as he was only in his early 20's. There was a story that did the rounds when we were children that Constable Baker had 'Poppie' in the sidecar of his motor bike taking him around to the Police station. As they went over the railway line 'Poppie' yelled out, "This is where I get out, copper" and went to climb out of the side car. Cst. Baker replied, "Oh, no you don't Poppie". With that he leant over and grabbed him by the hair and kept on riding with 'Poppie' running along beside him until they got around to the Police station.

One event we children all waited for each afternoon was when Charlie Fisher the local baker let his horses go. The bake-house was located in Railway Terrace, and each morning Charlie would ride his own horse down to the paddocks at the end of Railway Parade, and lead his two big draught horses back to the bake house by their rope halters. They were then harnessed up into two baker's carts and all the bread deliveries were done around the town. The two drivers I remember were Lennie Bolton and Lennie Dawson. At the end of the day the horses would be turned loose, they would come out of the baker-house yard, across the railway line, then full stretch gallop along Railway Parade back to their paddock for the night.

When the War finished my father came back to Riverstone. As my grandparents were getting older, my parents stayed on to manage the hotel. When my grandparents decided to retire Mum and Dad were reluctant to take over the licence because the government was about to introduce 10 o'clock closing and they were not interested in running the business with the longer hours.

We moved to a house in Castlereagh Street and Dad went back to being a butcher. They were marvellous years and the memories of the hotel are still very vivid in my mind.

LICENCEES OF THE ROYAL HOTEL

The Royal Hotel at Riverstone was constructed in 1896 and altered several times over the years until it was demolished in 1977.

Licencees of the hotel up to 1980 were:-

1896-98 James Collumb; 1899-03 James Wonson; 1904 Frederick Kingham;
1905 Roger Glanville; 1906-07 Mary Kane; 1908 Patrick Kieby; 1909-15 George James;
1915-19 William East; 1919-28 William East Jnr; 1928-35 Mrs V East; 1935-39 F Hasford;
1939-40 E Harten; 1940-43 W Douse; 1943-51 W J Morgan; 1951 G Punch; 1952 E Butler;
1953 G Punch; 1953-57 J Shapiro; 1957-61 F Butcher; 1961 E Armstrong; 1961-62 J McGrath;
1962-64 G Jefferies; 1964-66 K Williams; 1966-68 E Webb; 1968 L Sharpe; 1968-69 A Rafael;
1969-70 D Ewings; 1970-71 E Lewis; 1971-80 L Dawson; 1980 Mrs P Skinner.

From *Hawkesbury Journey* by D.G. Bowd