

# RIVERSTONE BUS SERVICE

*Clarrie Neal*

A reference to Riverstone in the *Daily Telegraph* Insearch column led Gordon Burn to contacting the Historical Society with information on the origin of the Riverstone Bus Service.

Gordon Burn, aged 25, came to Riverstone from Manly in 1946 to form the Riverstone Bus Service in a partnership with Noel Lakeman-Fidler. who had started the bus service a few months earlier in March. Prior to that, Noel Fidler had owned two 1929 La Salle hire cars that he sold to Norm Heather so as he could then concentrate on the new bus service. He was also the local Estate Agent leasing the shop in Parrington Terrace and sold this business to Ambrose Driscoll. Noel and Gordon agreed that each would receive a weekly wage of seven pounds.

Their first buses were:

- a 1928 Reo with a malthoid roof and capable of seating 20 passengers. (Gordon recalled this was the first bus he ever drove.)
- a 1935 Bedford seating 27 passengers.
- a 1942 Chev bought from the Glenorie Bus Company capable of seating 31 passengers.

There were three main bus runs, the Township, Marsden Park, and Rouse Hill/Box Hill. All the bus runs commenced from Garfield Road, opposite the Riverstone Parade junction. There were no designated bus stops, the stop was decided where the most passengers congregated.

The Township run travelled along Riverstone Parade, Crown Road, Hamilton Street, McCulloch Street, Riverstone Road, James Street, Oxford Street and Garfield Road. There were four services a day and the fare was sixpence.

The Marsden Park run extended along Garfield Road West, Marsden Park school, Richmond Road, Vine Street, Fermoy Street, Carnarvon Road and Garfield Road. There were three services a day through the week for the workers and shoppers and two services on Sundays for visitors to the area. Through the week this bus service also delivered the mail to the Berkshire Park Post Office and Gordon well remembers the times crossing the South Creek bridge during floods.

The Rouse Hill run extended from Garfield Road, Terry Road, Old Pitt Town Road, Edwards Road, Annangrove Road, Withers Road, Mile End Road, Windsor Road, and Garfield Road back to Riverstone. Gordon recalled the rainy days they had problems crossing the creek on Withers Road, often having to continue on along Annangrove Road to the Windsor Road to get access to Mile End Road.

He also recalled the days with the bus running late and missing the connection with the train at Riverstone. The bus would then race the train to Schofields, and sometimes with the co-operation of the train driver, get there in time for the passengers to catch their train.

The bus company bought a 1926 Essex tourer from Wally Cornwell to use as their company car; if the bus was unavailable, this car was used to pick up the passengers on the Rouse Hill run. Gordon has fond memories of this Box Hill run, picking up old Mrs Terry, Mrs Turnbull and others and taking them into Riverstone to do their shopping.

Gordon recalled their special runs, the buses to Richmond for the Thursday and Saturday night dance and pictures. Also another bus on Saturday night carried patrons to the Rivoli theatre at Vineyard, and the run to Castle Hill on their Show days.

In the afternoon they made four to five trips with a shuttle service from the meat works to the railway station and the fare was tuppence. Gordon recalled the workers would not pay the fare to travel to work in the morning, but when they finished their day's work they were glad to pay tuppence to get a ride to the station.

In 1947 they bought a 1938 Reo from the Punchbowl Bus Company to carry workers to and from Riverstone to the factories at St. Marys. It was a 42 seater and Noel Fidler was the driver for this run. Casual drivers who drove the buses for the company in these days included Norm Powe, Jack Keogh, Doug Turnbull, Stan Harris and Archie Beasley.

The bus depot was located in Garfield Road opposite the Parrington Terraces and attached to the depot was a small room that served as their office. In one of the four bays a pit was dug for the mechanic to service the vehicles, Gordon and Noel doing most of their own mechanical repairs. The 1938 Reo and the 1942 Chev had Perkins diesel engines that were difficult to start and were replaced with Chevrolet petrol engines.

Major repairs were carried out at both Nichols and Knights garages but Vic Knight was the only mechanic who could service the brakes on the 1937 Bedford. Gordon recalled this bus after turning from McCulloch Street into Riverstone Road always had problems when required to stop going down that hill. The brakes on this vehicle required attention every month. Transport inspectors came out every month to do a mechanical check and a brake test on each bus.

Gordon recalled petrol ration coupons were still being issued several years after the war had finished. He had to go to Sydney every month to get their quota of ration coupons, and also had to get a permit for each special trip made to such places as Richmond dances and Vineyard pictures.

Noel Fidler left the partnership in 1948 to take over a bus service in Windsor and John Storey joined Gordon in the Riverstone Bus Service. The following year Gordon and John took delivery of their first new bus, a 1949 Bedford with an all steel body.

John Storey died suddenly in 1951 while on a trip to Brisbane. At this point Gordon decided to sell the bus service and left Riverstone in 1951 to work for the Parramatta Bus company.

-----

Following his discharge from the RAAF Gordon lived in Manly for a short period with his wife Kay and their two eldest daughters. With the opportunity to start the bus service he came to Riverstone with his family in 1946.

Accommodation was a serious problem at the time and they had to share a 'house' with Noel Fidler and his family. Their 'house' was the two rooms adjacent Carlisles store in Garfield Road, near the Olympia theatre, the Fidler family had the front room and the Burn family lived in the back room.

His wife Kay recalled their experiences at the time –

- a curtain was used to divide the room.
- water was not connected to the house.
- every morning Kay's first job was go outside to pump water from the well into a large jug for use during the day.
- washing up was done in a dish on the table.
- there was no ice box, only a meat safe.
- cooking was done on a primus stove.
- the baker, Mr. Kingman, delivered the bread to the back fence.
- the milkman, Jimmy Martin left the milk in a jug on the side step.
- rats were a continual problem.

The family lived in this room for over twelve months and then moved into one of the four new Housing Commission homes that had just been completed in Wood Street. Gordon recalled asking the agent if they could have the first house on the hill as it was better for starting the bus on the cold frosty mornings, it made the rolling kick start a lot easier. The family recalled the thundering hooves of the horses and the dust raised as they passed their side fence on their way from the yards at the rail station to the knackery at Rouse Hill.

-----

The bus service was sold to Doug Barnes who took over in June 1951. Doug also bought the adjacent house and built his garage and service station at the front. Doug increased the bus services and began running special services to Harold Park and Londonderry trotting meetings, and to picnics held at Mitchell Park and Bungool, which is now known as the Riverside Oaks Golf Course. Also popular were the Riverstone Football club's away games held on a Sunday afternoon, sometimes they used all three buses.

Doug extended the Marsden Park run by deleting Vine Street and Fermoy Street. from the route and continued along the Richmond Road down to Townsend Road, Meadow Road, Durham Road and Carnarvon Road to Garfield Road.

The 12 o'clock bus service to Marsden Park was used to carry the mail to their Post Office and it became a 'service' in every sense of the word. Many residents along Garfield Road would wait in front of their homes to collect their mail direct from the driver, and Tom Aisbett the headmaster at Marsden Park school would be out in front of the school, or have one of his students waiting to accept delivery.

The remainder of the mail was delivered to the Marsden Park general store which was a Post Office agency and B. P. garage. The local residents collected their mail from pigeon boxes inside the store.

After picking up the mail to be posted the bus would continue on along the Richmond Road to Clydesdale, drop their mail into their RMB and continue on to the Berkshire Park store and Post Office. Mail to be posted was picked up and the bus, as it returned, would drop mail into the RMBs for Ted Jones and Echo Vale dairies. Mail was also delivered to the houses along Garfield Road on the return trip; Ron Shields recalled it was customary to drive the bus right up to the back door of the Delarue's house to deliver their mail.

The bus returned to Riverstone, delivered the mail bags to the Post Office, and, after the driver finished his lunch, it was time to do the school run.

Ron also recalled the 1956 flood when the Marsden Park residents had been isolated for several days and were running short on supplies. To enable a bus to get through the floodwaters, Doug Barnes extended the exhaust pipe of the Reo bus to prevent it stalling. After the bread and other necessities had been stacked on the seats and safely delivered, several residents decided to return with Doug into Riverstone to complete their shopping. Later that day, and with their shopping completed, Doug returned them to their homes. Ron Shields has seen a photo of this bus ploughing through the floodwaters, he believed it had been taken by Angus Mortlock. (The Historical Society would like a copy of this photo, so if any reader can help, please contact us.)

When Doug Barnes sold out in 1958 and moved to Melbourne to take over the Sunshine Bus Service he took the 1949 Bedford with him. He sold the garage business and house to Ken Spear and the Bus Service was bought by Laurie Bower. The buses used by Laurie included a 26 seat Oldsmobile bought from Gaspers of Windsor, a 1942 Maple Leaf and a Ford bus, from the Shell Oil Co., that had been used to transport their workers from Clyde station to the Refinery.

Drivers for Laurie Bower included Jimmy Heaton, Archie Beasley, Bert Smithers and Ron Shields. Ron also recalls acting as the conductor and collecting the three shilling return fare on the bus to the Richmond dances and pictures on Saturday and Thursday nights. These buses proved very popular with the younger residents of Riverstone and it was often a case of standing room only.

John Cole took control of the Riverstone Bus Service in 1960.



Riverstone Bus Service buses.

L to R: 1928 Reo, 1935 Bedford, 1942 Chev.

Photo courtesy of Gordon Burn.

*Compiled by Clarrie Neal from information and photos provided by Gordon Burn and Ron Shields.*