

Senior Constable 'Charlie' Crawford

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During my search for information on the Windsor Police Station Hazel Brown from Richmond contacted me. At the time her name didn't mean anything to me until she mentioned that her father had been a Policeman for many years. I was very interested when she said that he had been stationed at Windsor during the War years but what immediately caught my attention was when she mentioned that her maiden name was Crawford and all of a sudden the memories came flooding back. The only Policeman I ever remembered at Riverstone was Senior Constable 'Charlie' Crawford. Anyone who grew up in Riverstone from 1947-1955 will remember the tiny building that served as the Riverstone Police Station. This unique Police Station is now located at the Australiana Village at Wilberforce as a reminder of days past.

Just as familiar to the older residents is the Lock-up keeper who lived in the residence during those years, Senior Constable Charles 'Charlie' Crawford who for many years kept the lawbreakers of Riverstone in check.

Crime was not particularly rampant in Riverstone in those days, but drunks, fights, drowning, lost children, thieving and the odd domestic kept him occupied. Constables who assisted him over the years were Allen Sergeant, Colin 'Babyface' Evans and Karl Egeroff. Often however he went out by himself in his familiar motor bike and side-car. So over the usual 'cuppa' at her residence in Richmond, Hazel related her memories of her father's years of service as Lock-up Keeper at Riverstone Police Station.

My father Charlie Crawford was a country boy born in Dubbo NSW on 9th September 1901. He and his wife Florence Alethea settled in Maitland where he worked on a farm. In 1933 with a wife and family to support and in search of a better life for them, he decided to join the New South Wales Police Force. He was a big man over six foot and well built; he maintained his fitness with strong physical labour.

His training for the Police seems very frugal in comparison to to-day's standards, six weeks at Redfern was all that he required and then in his new Police uniform, hand-cuffs, a Smith & Wesson pistol, a rubber baton and a Police whistle he presented himself at Parramatta Police Station for duty. His registered number was 2897. Dad rented a house there and so we moved to Parramatta and the family settled in.

Parramatta was not kind to Mum and Dad, they lost a baby son at five weeks old and not long after a three-year-old daughter. Deeply hurt by these events Dad applied for a transfer and in 1934 he took up General Duties at Windsor Police Station. While at Windsor he suffered the first of two motor bike accidents. Coming back from a duty run to Parramatta he attempted to pull over a drunk driver who refused to stop and rammed him into a guide post breaking his leg. He remained at Windsor until 1947 and then took up the Lock-up keepers job at Riverstone.

Originally the officer assigned to Riverstone was Constable Beyh who was being transferred from Coonamble. However when his wife visited the house at Riverstone she refused to live there, as there were only two bedrooms and they had a growing family. As we were grown up and on the verge of marriage and only our brother remained at home Dad, agreed to do a swap and move to Riverstone.

It is thought by some older residents of the town that the first Police Station in Riverstone was in Castlereagh Street the second house on the right hand side where Mrs Dan Doolan used to live. In the 1920s a new residence was constructed on half an acre of land on the corner of Railway Terrace and Elizabeth Street. On the western side of the house a small wooden building served as the Police Station. It was approximately 2m x 2m having room only for one desk, two chairs, a typewriter and telephone. An even smaller verandah across the front completed this unique Police Station.

The residence was originally built of brick with a slate roof, however in the 1980s the roof was stripped and replaced with tiles. A verandah with unusual curved walls, and a picket fence across the front completed the building. Although comfortable it was only four rooms with two stone cells at the rear. The front door opened onto a hallway, on the right hand side was the lounge room and second bedroom and the left hand side the main bedroom and the kitchen. The rear entrance to the house was via the kitchen. Outside the kitchen window was a well, which had been boarded up. Not long after the Crawfords moved in, a small bedroom was attached to the lounge room.

The residence at Riverstone did have its drawbacks, the main one being that prisoners had to be walked through the bathroom at the rear of the house to get them into the cells. Many were the times that a guest had to make a quick exit from the bath to enable a prisoner to be brought through. Also, if a particularly fractious prisoner kept banging on the cell door, anyone sleeping in the second bedroom was kept awake all night. Later on they moved the bathroom and added a new entrance to the cells with a closed in courtyard.

The people who occupied the cells were mostly drunks and two who are remembered by Hazel were 'Jockey' Stevens and 'Poppy' Cameron. *Most offenders only stayed overnight and Mum would cook them a good breakfast in the morning, usually sausages, eggs, bacon, toast and a mug of tea.*

Hazel also recalls: *Often on a Friday night Dad would have to attend a local dance at the old RSL hall and no doubt there would be a fight. If the local boys thought that an outsider was paying too much attention to a Riverstone girl then a 'blue' would be on.*

Dad always said to troublemakers when he stopped a fight, "If you've got any fight left in you come down to the station in the morning and meet me in the exercise yard." I don't recall anyone ever taking him up on this offer.

Dad was called out at all hours of the night often to Schofields where 'Poppy' Cameron lived with his Mother. If he was drunk and fighting Dad would go out in the middle of the night by himself, never knowing what he was going to find when he got there. He always had his gun and hand-cuffs with him but I don't recall him ever using the gun. He was very protective of Mum who did not keep very good health, so he got a kelpie dog named Pal to stay with her when she was by herself. Sometimes when he was out on a call, the locals would walk past and run a stick along the wooden fence, this drove Pal into a frenzy of barking.

It was while at Riverstone that Dad suffered his second motor bike accident. The sidecar came away from the bike when the coupling broke and Dad was thrown from the bike onto the road. The injuries he sustained eventually led to his retirement from the Force.

Hazel also recalled one of the saddest moments in 1951 when she came to Riverstone for six months to look after her Mother who was very ill. Constable Clive Williams had finished his shift for the day and as he was leaving the station on his motor bike she called out to him "Be careful". He called back "only the good die young". A few minutes later he was killed in a motor vehicle accident at Vineyards. The service took place at Windsor Methodist Church, it was a Police funeral, very impressive, and the biggest funeral in Windsor Hazel has ever seen.

Hazel continues: *I often asked Dad in later years why he never applied to be a Sergeant and he replied that it wasn't worth it for 6d (5c) a day extra and if he obtained a Sergeant's position he would have had to leave Riverstone. However in 1955 it was decided to upgrade Riverstone station and therefore a Sergeant would be required to supervise. Dad then decided to transfer to Richmond Police Station.*

On his departure from Riverstone the local Chamber of Commerce presented them with a silver tea service which I still have. Dad then transferred to Richmond Police Station and he and Mum lived in the old Police residence at North Richmond. It was here that Mum passed away. On 24 March 1957 my Dad, Senior Constable Charlie Crawford retired. He passed away at his sister's house in Parramatta on 13 November 1965. His funeral service was held at St. Paul's Church of England, Riverstone and he was laid to rest with Mum at Marsden Park cemetery.