

Thripp's Rivo of the 1950s

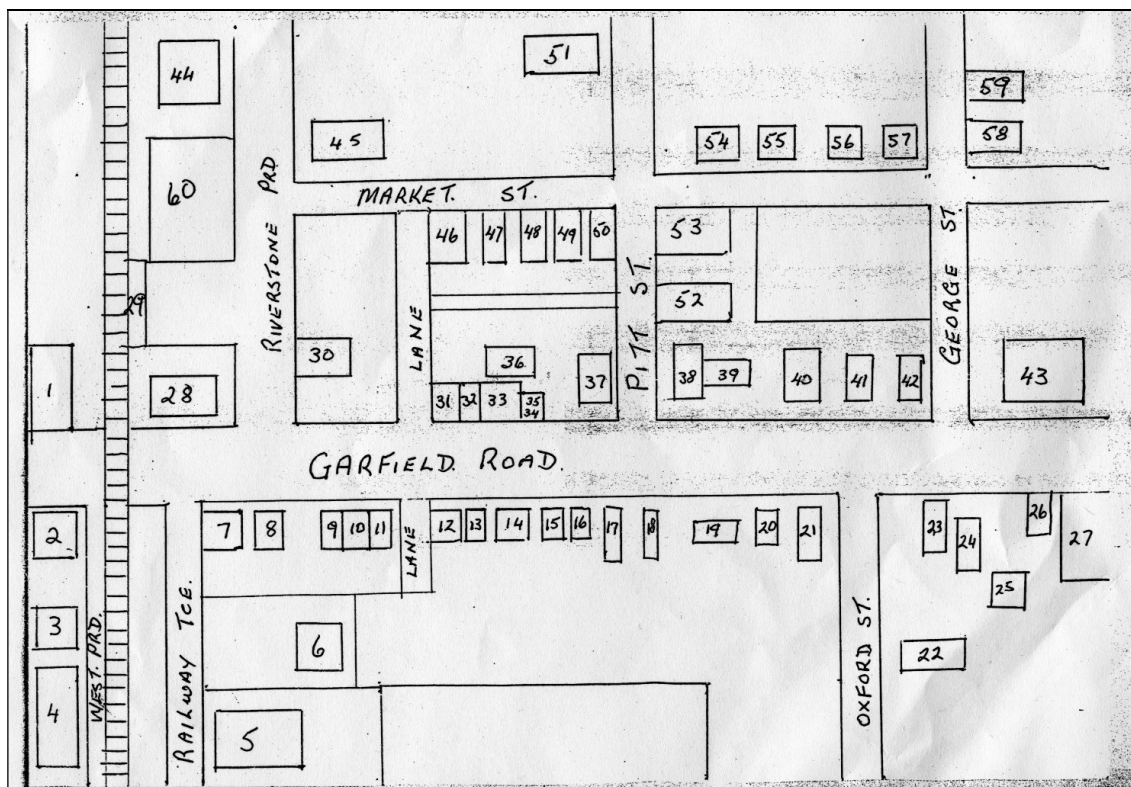
Judith Lewis & Graham Britton

About six years ago *Graham Britton's* doctor told him he needed to get a hobby. He thought long and hard about it before deciding he'd try to make a model of the Riverstone Royal Hotel (demolished in the 1970s). *Graham* chose the hotel because he had spent his early years living in No. 3 of the terraced houses which were just down from the Royal. He was so pleased with his effort that he decided next to build the terraced houses. He then decided he would try to build the township of Riverstone as he remembered it in the 1950s. The result, the much acclaimed Riverstone Township model that has been on display at the Museum, a number of Riverstone Festivals and at the 120th anniversary celebrations of Riverstone Public School.

The work took *Graham* eighteen months to complete and his total expense was roughly \$30 – for the base of compressed pine, measuring 10ft. by 4ft., and for the model animals, cars and train (his grandchildren also happily contributed some of the latter). All other materials came from around his home or on the scrap heap at Mac's Hire, where he was working at the time. Fences and electricity poles were made from matchsticks or kebab sticks, cotton was used for wires, plastic folders made the rooves and plastic inserts the windows, wire bound together made the trees and pieces of sponge formed the leaves.

Graham emphasises that the model is not made to scale, some houses just wouldn't fit and have been left out. It is the Riverstone of the 1950s as he remembers it – in his own words, "I was just a rough old bloke doing something he wanted to do".

Graham's plan has made it possible for us to walk through the old town with him. Let's do it!



1. The Butchers' Shop: (now a Vet's) was Riverstone's only butchers' shop from 1922 until 1953 when a new shop was built closer to the township on the other side of the railway line.

Inside the shop there was a long counter, chopping blocks where butchers were working, white and blue tiles on the walls and plenty of sawdust on the floor. A cashier sat at the counter behind a money till.

The old shop then became Norm Foley's Barbers' Shop.

2. The Royal Hotel: Built in 1906 and demolished in 1977. It was *Paddy Morgan*, the licensee at the time, who gave Graham the nickname "*Threepence*" or "*Thrippoo*". He had a small dog called "Tuppence". Graham was a little bloke at the time and *Mr Morgan* claimed he wasn't much bigger than "Tuppence" so he became known as "*Threepence*" (pronounced *Thrippence*).

3. Grainger's Shop: Between the Royal and the Terraces, sold all types of mixed goods and fruit and vegetables.

4. Terraced Houses: There were four families living in the Terraces in the 1950s— in No. 1 were people who, according to *Graham* were "poshler than us", in No. 2 were *Ray Keegan's* parents, *Les & Eunice Britton* and their then five children (they were to have eleven) were in No. 3 and a German family lived in No. 4.

5. Wally Wood's Store: *Graham* recalls his mother sending him there with a carry bag made from an old sugar bag, folded in half, with two handles sewn on, and armed with a shopping list. *Wally* bought the shop in 1949 from *Charlie Knight*, son-in-law of the original owner, *Chas Davis*. With his sister *Jean*, and with a staff which included *Verlie Sullivan* and *Dot* and *Howard Perrett* and delivery staff of *Ken Donnelly* and *Eddie Phillis*, *Wally* ran this successful grocery business until 1962 when it became AP Motors.

6. and 12. Fisher's Bakehouse & Shop: *Charlie Fisher's* bakehouse was in Railway Terrace, the shop fronted Garfield Road. They sold bread and cakes. The *Fisher* family lived in the house behind the shop. The house had a green roof and picket fence (When the model was on display at one of the Festivals *Nancy Hayden* nee *Fisher* complimented *Graham* on the accuracy of his model).

7. Rosenthal's General Store: The *Rosenthal* family operated this store from 1923 till 1973. It was a general store in the true sense – you could buy produce, groceries, hardware, tools, clothing, shoes, furniture, manchester, kitchenware, haberdashery and even linoleum. *Graham* recalls the polished wooden floors, the huge counters and the large display windows. *Kevin Lewis* recalls helping with grocery deliveries. People would drop off their orders, the goods would be packed in boxes and delivered to the residents (with no delivery charge).

8. Wattle Milk Bar: Horrie and Pat Kelly took over The Wattle in 1943 and operated it till 1952. Alongside Rosenthal's, it was a milk bar and delicatessen with a gauzed-off room for the cold meats on the right from the entry. Behind the counter on this side were some groceries. There were a number of tables and chairs on the left and a counter with lollies to the side. The main counter was across the full length of the back wall. Besides Mrs. Kelly and her daughter Noeleen (at weekends) others to work there in the '50s included Jean Phillis and Judith Drake. In 1954 Jack Notaras bought The Wattle and operated it for the next 27 years. Owners lived in the premises behind the shop.

9. Stacey's Fruit Shop: The Stacey family ran this store from 1942 to 1962. The shop had a long counter, with fruit and vegetables displayed behind it. Potatoes were on the floor in large bags. There was only about four feet of space on the buyers' side of the counter. *Graham's* only "job", which he described as "good fun", before he went to work fulltime, was helping with deliveries with young *Dick* and *John Stacey*. Deliveries, in an old ute, went as far afield as Cow Flat. In the shop old *Dick* always wore a leather apron, on deliveries young *Dick* wore a leather money bag.

10. Now an optometrist's, previously, from 1965 to 1999, Eric Brookes' Shoe Store. *Do you remember what it was in the '50s? Unbelievably Graham cannot! Perhaps a ladies hairdressers?*

11. Keating's Barbers' Shop: *Graham's sister Joan worked there.*

12. See 6.

13. George Trahanas' House & Shop: The shop was real "Happy Days" style with booth type seating. On movie nights it was packed during interval. *Graham* used to enjoy meeting friends after work there for a bottle of coke. If the top of your bottle had an ace inside you got a free coke.

14. Charlie Murrell's Olympia Theatre: Movies were shown on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights with a matinee on Saturday afternoons. You couldn't afford to miss going on a Saturday afternoon because you always had to find out how the hero had survived the precarious situation he'd been left in at the end of the previous episode. You were usually given nine pence for "the picture", sixpence to get in and threepence to spend at interval.

Old Charlie would stop the movie if there was any disturbance. Someone one day threw a meat pie, which hit the centre of the screen. *Charlie* stopped the movie and offered to donate ten pounds to Windsor Hospital if someone would identify the culprit. Many knew who it was but no one identified him.

"*Tip*" *Davis* and *Robbie Shepherd* from the Riverstone Motorcycle Club persuaded *Charlie* to rent out the theatre for a special Wednesday night screening of the Marlon Brando movie "The Wild One". Hundreds of Bikies from neighbouring clubs lined both sides of Garfield Road with their bikes. Fifteen minutes after the movie finished there was not a bike or bokie to be seen.

15. Carlisle's Grocery Store: *Roy Cook*, manager of Carlisle's would give you threepence for your empty drink bottle. He'd also give you sixpence worth of broken biscuits for two. *Graham* and his brothers used to walk along the railway line near the meatworks where the men would throw their empty bottles. The boys soon learnt he'd give you an equally huge bag for one empty bottle, so they took to going in singly with a bottle each.

As with the other grocery stores, mothers could send a child down with a written order to be delivered later and paid for on delivery. If she was "down the street" and only wanted a few items, she could sit at the counter whilst the grocer weighed up her exact requirements into small paper bags.

16. Blair's Mixed Business: Run by *Lizzie Blair*, her brother *Billie* and his wife *Edna*, was another shop that opened at picture times. It did not have the variety of goodies offered by the other two so you were more likely to get served there more quickly. The *Blairs* lived behind the shop with their children *Ray*, *Margaret* and *Mervyn*. *Billie* also delivered fruit and vegetables in an old ute. This shop was relocated to the Australian Village at Wilberforce.

17. NSW Produce Store: Run by *Bert Lillia*. Out the front on the footpath was a gravity fed pump from which you could buy kerosene, a popular heating fuel in the '50s.

18. Fred Roots' Mixed Business: Originally owned by *Mary Wallace* and known by everyone as *Aunty Mary's Store*.

19. Barnes Bus Co. and Ampol Garage: *Doug Barnes* drove a speedboat on the Hawkesbury River. His boat hit and killed a swimmer on the southern side of the bridge and after that speedboats were restricted to the northern side.

20. Dr. Boag's Surgery: *Dr. James Fraser-Boag* had been a doctor in WWII. A brilliant doctor he was remembered more for his abrupt, military-like manner. *Graham's* wife, *Carol's*, first job was as his receptionist, for one week!

21. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church: Moved from its Oxford Street site, now serves as the St. Andrew's Uniting Church's hall.

22. Bottles' House: (Still standing, with it's "twin" having been recently erected adjoining it). There were always horses in the adjacent paddocks.
23. Fred Coulter's Bike Shop: became his wife's Ladies' Wear Shop in the '50s. Behind the Ladies' Wear Shop was a Ladies' Hairdressers' Salon. The shop is now Bruno's Barbers' Shop.
24. Coulter's House: The *Coulter* family lived next door to their shop.
25. The Greig Family Home: Possibly Riverstone's oldest building, this is now a storage shed for its owners who live in the large brick home at the front. The first Presbyterian Church service in Riverstone was held here in 1872
26. Mulford's Tuck Shop: Was built after *Les* and *Ruth Mulford* and their four small children, *Betty, Fay, Les* and *Roy* moved to Riverstone in 1939. The family lived behind the shop, which was always open, and sold all manner of foodstuffs so that, if visitors arrived unexpectedly at the weekend you were always able to buy cold meats from there. *Les* also made deliveries the most popular being bottles of Noon's soft drinks.
27. Riverstone Public School: Built in 1928, it became the Infants' Department when the new school was opened in 1957. In 2002 the whole school was consolidated to the one refurbished site in Elizabeth Street and today Casuarina School occupies the Garfield Road site.
28. Stationmaster's Residence: (Still standing but unoccupied) was built in 1886. Prior to this the Stationmaster resided in living quarters at the station in what is now the Parcel's Office.
29. Railway Station: The original Riverstone railway station (1864) was a short wooden platform with a brick building that was a combined waiting room, station office and living quarters for the Stationmaster. At the Water Tank steam trains filled up with water. If you were running late for the train you knew you had a little extra time "up your sleeve".
30. Conway's Newsagency & Barber's Shop: Built in 1925 is now owned by *Geoff Pfister* & was, until 2007, his hairdressing business which is now operated by *Nicole*. Behind the small paper shop at the front was *Ossie Robbins* barber shop. *Brian McNamara* ran the shop in the 1950s and it was *Brian* who gave *Graham* his first paid haircut. On the corner of Garfield Road and Riverstone (where the Florist's now stands) was the Conway's tennis court.
31. The CBC Bank and 32 Williams the Chemist: This was one building, sharing a common entrance step and then completely divided by a brick wall. Both were small premises with a single counter. The chemist shop had most items secured in glass cabinets behind the counter
33. Nichols' Garage: *Bill Nichols* began the first motor repair shop in Riverstone in 1926, opposite the present day post office. The following year he moved to the corner of Carlton Street and Garfield Road. In 1935 he built Nichols' garage on what is now the Commonwealth Bank site. The garage had two gravity fed petrol pumps on the footpath. The business was relocated in 1962 to the site opposite the Uniting Church.
34. Billy Hughes' Boot Repair Shop: Shoes were an expensive item in the 1950s and shoe repairers were much in demand, which probably explains why *Graham* remembers the dust and cobwebs in the shop's window.
35. Mrs. Harris' Fish Shop: As well as opening Riverstone's first fish shop, the hard working *Mrs. Harris* was also a cleaner at the school and an usherette at the Olympia Theatre.
36. Mrs. Connie Moulds' House and Stables: *Connie Moulds* bred, owned and trained horses and her son *Laurie* went on to become one of NSW's leading trainer/drivers, winning the Sydney Drivers' Premiership in 1962-63. At the first night trotting meeting in Sydney, in 1949, "Machine Wood", a horse rescued from the knackery and trained by *Connie* and driven by *Laurie* was the "sentimental winner" of the night.

37. The Post Office: Was built in 1942 to replace the original one which had been established at the railway station in 1877.
38. Ambrose Driscoll's Real Estate Agency: Later became Driscoll & Reid and is now in new premises, First National. *Ambrose Driscoll* was a licensed auctioneer and valuer, the man who came to value your worth for the dreaded "death duties" of the time.
39. Parrington's Terrace: Built in 1883. The three terraced houses, still in use, have changed little in that time. (Not shown is the Drake family home).
40. Dr. Carroll's Surgery and House: Until the early 1940s Riverstone people knew this former house as Sister Barnes' hospital where most children born between 1926 and 1941 would have been delivered by Sister Barnes. *Dr Carroll* and his wife had ten children and were very popular members of the community with *Dr. Carroll* also being the doctor for the Riverstone Meat Company. Not shown is the small cottage now occupied by Solicitor Mervyn Cathers.
41. Tozer's House: Had verandahs along three sides. A paddock, then three homes, the centre one of them being the Hillier family home, remembered for the stone lions that sat either side of the entrance to the house, the third one being:-
42. Mr. & Mrs. Albert Woods House: *Albie Woods* was a keen gardener. He grew prize-winning dahlias and every spring the fence on the George Street side was always a mass of sweet peas.
43. The Masonic Hall: Riverstone's first public school opened in 1883 on this site. It became the Masonic Hall after the school closed in 1929. *Graham* recalls his father being one of a number of men who joined the Masons. It was the only place you could get a beer on a Sunday! In the 1950s, as the only large hall in the town, it was in great demand as a venue for concerts, fetes, weddings, parties, fancy dress balls and dancing lessons. It reopened as the Blacktown City Bicentennial Museum in 1988.
44. Taylor's Produce: (Now Uncle Arthurs'). Malcolm Anderson and Colin Cubitt worked there. *Graham* was sent there to buy pollard to feed the family's ducks.
45. Eric Brookes' Shoe Repairs & Pool Hall: Originally *McCutcheon's* General Store this building later became rooms for *Dr. Quadri*.
46. Riverstone-Schofields RSL Club: *Graham's* fondest memories are of the Christmas parties, Santa sitting under the tree, running up to receive one's present, ice cream buckets in the huge green, padded containers (called shippers) and Noon's crinkly orange drinks.
47. The Jack Douglass'. 48. ? 49. The Holloways'. 50. The Miljerek's? *Tony*, son *Alec*.
51. One of the 3 houses in Cockroach Alley.
52. Methodist Church: Ceased to function as a church when the Methodists and Presbyterians combined to become the Uniting Church in 1967. Services were held in the former Presbyterian Church and until 1969 Sunday School classes were held in the former Methodist Church.
53. CWA Rooms & Baby Health Centre: Opened in 1952, this "modern" building replaced the small wooden room adjacent to the Railway Station and Stockyards, which had served as a Baby Health Centre since 1934.
54. Major Nelson's large weatherboard home
55. Mr. & Mrs. Keating's 56. The Burnett's
57. The Leslie's. 58. The Benz's. 59. The Puzny's.
60. Stockyards: Like most Riverstone children in the 50s, *Graham* was in fear of the horses that were unloaded into these yards off the trains. The trains pulled in to the station, the horses were unloaded into the yards and then driven through the streets and out to Burns' knackery (on the Windsor Road and now Burns Pet Food) by the stockmen. There could be as many as 300 horses galloping towards unsuspecting school children. They had every right to be fearful as *John Phillis*,

one of the stockmen, later told *Graham* he had travelled to Queensland with *Texas Burns* to bring down the first lot of these horses and many of them had been wild brumbies.

Cattle were also unloaded from the station into these yards on at least one occasion. It is remembered well because a steer escaped, ran over the roof of *Lachie Lumsden's* car parked outside his Chemist's Shop opposite the station, denting the roof of the car down to the passenger's seat.

Graham's model of 1950s Riverstone conjures up great memories to those who lived there at the time and gives today's generation a glimpse at a lifestyle they have probably heard about but will never experience. Progress?



Graham's model on display at Riverstone Public School (above) and Riverstone Festival (below).



Photos courtesy of Rosemary Phillis