

The Strachan Family

Clarrie Neal

The following is based on an article by Clarrie Neal. Details of the early Strachan families were provided by Alan and Gloria Strachan. The second part of the article covers the connections between the Gunton and Strachan families, in particular the family of Herb and Nellie Strachan.

James Inkson Strachan

The story of the Strachan family in this district commenced on the 12th July 1839 when James Inkson Strachan and his family arrived as free settlers aboard the *Heber*. They lived in the Petersham-Five dock area for several years before purchasing *The Bee Hive Inn* on the Windsor Road, Vineyard, on the 9th January 1854.

The Inn had been built by a James Barnett in 1848 and was used as a resting place for travellers and their horses between Sydney and the Hawkesbury Valley. In 1856 James Strachan bought another 79 acres on the opposite side of the Windsor Road, bounded by Bandon Road, O'Connell and Otago Streets.

Twins were born to his first wife Isabella and after her death he married for a second time (to Elizabeth) and another four children were born.

James Inkson Strachan 1811-1876 married 1. Isabella Hair 1807-1855

1. Isabella R. Strachan (*married Frederick John Alcorn*)

2. Robert Strachan (Isabella and Robert were twins)

married 2. Elizabeth Crewe

3. Jemima

4. John William

5. James Henry

6. Andrew

In 1874 James (Snr) sold the *Bee Hive Inn* and moved to Windsor, where he died two years later. He left the 79 acre farm to his son Robert.

Robert Strachan

Robert married Mary Ann Phipps in 1865 and continued to live on the farm and orchard at Vineyard. It was here they raised their family of ten children, 7 boys and 3 girls. Alice, James, Annie, Arthur, George, Henry, Frederick, Clara, Alfred and Herbert.

1. Alice b. 12/11/1865 m. Simon Raines - lived at Westmead

2. James b. 17/9/1867 m. Nellie Raines - lived at Vineyard then Westmead.

3. Annie b. 3/3/1870

4. Arthur Charles b. 21/6/1872 m. Eva Lavetta Clout - Lived at Vineyard where they reared six children, Frank, Thelma, Blanche, Arthur, Dulcie, Lavetta. (Frank's family of Gloria, Eric, Mavis, Alan and Rosemary also lived at Vineyard.)

5. George Robert b. 21/6/1872 m. Alice Maud Shepherd. - Lived at Riverstone where they reared three children:

a) Dorrie m. Arthur Keegan (children Kevin and Fay).

b) Mick m. Florrie (children Betty and Barbara).

c) Nita m. Alec Goddard (daughter Jan).

6. Henry C. b. 13/3/1877 m. Ruby Gunton - lived at Auburn.

7. Fred Ernest b. 26/7/1879 m. Charlotte (son Lance).

8. Clara Maria b. 18/11/1882 m. James Wheeler.

9. Alfred b. 22/5/1884 m. Ellie Jane Holm (children Keith, Iris and Esma).

10. Herbert b. 2/10/1886 m. Nellie Gunton - further details appear later in the article.



Early photo of Robert Strachan



Mary Ann Phipps wife of Robert.

Photos: Courtesy Gloria Strachan

The Gunton - Strachan connections

The following details of the Gunton - Strachan family trees were provided by Joyce Foster:

Throughout the 1800s and the early 1900s the family names Strachan and Gunton were widely known throughout the district, the issue becoming even more intriguing as we learnt that many of the families lived along 'Butchers Row', and that many worked at the Meatworks.

This inter-relationship is very complex and as it spans the 100 year existence of the old Meatworks, it is a vital link in the history of the Riverstone township and its community.

The Gunton Family

Robert (Bob) Gunton (1860-1940) was the first drover to be employed by Benjamin Richards when he opened his Meatworks in 1878. In 1885 he married Mary Shepherd and they built their house on the Meatworks property, opposite the junction of Riverstone Parade and Hobart Street. The house was often referred to as the 'kitchens' and it was here they raised their family of five girls and one boy.

1. Ruby m. Harry Strachan.
2. Olive m. Perce Douglas - Darcy, Jack and Reg 'Curly'.
3. Elsie m. Gordon Boyd - Gloria, Norma, Laurie, Sam and Gary.
4. Ila m. Joe Fitzgerald - Kate and Ron.
5. Nellie m. Herb Strachan (see below for children).
6. Jack m. Sylvia Boyd (Esme, Eric and Marion).

Even at this stage the close family ties were evident with the two sisters, Ruby and Nellie marrying two brothers, Harry and Herb Strachan. Also Elsie and Jack both married members of the Boyd family.

Jack and the spouses of his five sisters all worked at the Meatworks. The families of Gordon Boyd, Joe Fitzgerald and Herb Strachan all lived in Richards Avenue, which was always referred to as 'Butchers Row'. Jack and Sylvia lived on the corner of Hobart Street and Riverstone Parade, on the other side of the line, opposite his parents home.

Bob Gunton was not only drover at the Works, when required he drove cattle over the mountains from the west and from the Hunter Valley. Bob was a renowned teller of yarns and the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette* occasionally printed some of these tales during the 1890s. Granddaughter Joyce Foster recalled Bob telling these yarns so many times she felt he actually believed them to be true, no matter how far-fetched they were.

When Bob retired he moved to 64 Crown Road, next door to his daughter Olive Douglas. Bob held the position of head stockman until he retired and was succeeded by his son-in-law, Herb Strachan. This family tradition was to continue. When Herb retired, he was succeeded by his son Siddie.

The Family of Herb Strachan and Nellie Gunton

Herb Strachan (1886-1961) and Nellie Gunton (1888-1944) married on 27 August 1908. It is believed they first lived at 19 Butchers Row in one of the original Meatworks houses. As the family grew they moved into No. 35 and then into No.49 when the McNamara family moved from that house out to their farm on Carnarvon Road.

There were eleven children in this family, two died in their infancy.

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| 1. Jean | b. 1909 | m. Telford 'Snowy' Griffin. |
| 2. Marie | b. 1911 | m. Sid 'Tiger' Locke (children Shirley, Siddie and Lawrence). |
| 3. Siddie | b. 1913 | m. Esma Marlin (children June, Denis and Brenda). |
| 4. Ena | b. 1915 | m. George Hopkins |
| 5. Nancy | b. 1918 | m. Malcolm Anderson (children Reginald, Valda and Rhonda). |
| 6. Joyce | b. 1920 | m. Ken Foster (daughter Christine). |
| 7. Merle | b. 1923 | m. Lawson Banks |
| 8. Max | b. 1927 | m. 1. Fay Wheeler 2. Blanche Meredith (children Brian and Ron). |
| 9. Barry | b. 1934 | |

All nine surviving members of the family worked at some stage of their lives at the Meatworks.

Jean - worked several years in the Preserver.

Marie - worked in the Bag Room.

Siddie - worked all of his life as a drover.

Ena - spent more than 30 years as the Main Office cleaner.

Nancy - spent varying periods working in the old and new canteens, and for a time also worked in the tuck shop opposite the Works. Nancy is best remembered when she was crowned Queen of Riverstone in 1934. *(Her story is covered in the following article in the Journal.)*

Joyce - worked in the Packing Room, the latter part as the Forelady.

Merle - worked in the Preserver and in later years, the canteens.

Max - worked as a drover for several years before leaving to work for Blacktown Council.

Barry - followed the same course as Max.

Memories from Siddie, Ena and Joyce Strachan.

In a taped interview in the 1980s, with Lorraine Forbes, Siddie recalled:

- the six original homes in the "Row", with the Strachan family at No. 19, and other homes occupied by the Holloways, Brookes, Jarretts, Robbins and Fitzgeralds.
- carrying the lamp of a night from room to room.
- his father (Herb) recalling his early days living in Brisbane Road.
- the newer homes being built in the late 1920's and 30's.
- when they moved from No.19 to No.35, Herb's brother George moved into No.19.
- collecting mail from the Post Office at the railway station.
- using slates at school for writing.
- walking home from school every day to have their lunch.
- the drip safes and the ice boxes.
- mother using the copper for washing their clothes in the wash house in the back yard.
- the well at the rear of Conway's shop.

Lorraine also taped an interview with Ena who recalled:

- Gran Gunton's house on the hill, known as the 'kitchens'.
- the huge kitchen, with Gran always cooking, preserving and curing bacon.
- the nice gardens and pots.
- the Chinese working in the nearby market gardens.
- the cow bales under the peppercorn trees.
- when the hawkers, Rosie and daughter Delia came with bags of clothes for sale, they would stay overnight with Gran.
- 'Cockroach Alley' and the lady known as 'Beardie' Mary Johnson.
- 'Beardie' paying sixpence to her and Siddie to sneak firewood from the railway sawmills and stack it behind her house.
- the old fire station next to Taylor's Produce store.

Ena also recalled her father droving cattle bought at Homebush sales back to Riverstone. The sales were held each Monday and Thursday, Herb and his fellow drovers would arrive at the saleyards early in the afternoon, collect their cattle and begin the return trip at 3.00 pm. They would ride through the night, the first part of the trip being along Parramatta Road. They usually arrived back in Riverstone around 6.00 am where the stock were counted to ensure none had been lost. If any stock had been lost, they would remount their horses after breakfast and retrace their route.

Joyce recalled as you worked along the road you could stop and have a chat with everybody. The line wasn't fenced, you could walk across the lines to the shops, or along the line to get to the station. She loved to visit Gran at the 'kitchens', a large rambling house surrounded by verandahs and with many rooms to explore. Gran was forever cooking scones and biscuits and there was always something to eat.

Joyce also has fond memories of when the electricity came to Riverstone in 1934 and her sister was crowned Queen of the Ball at the celebrations. She remembers the first night she turned the light on, how dirty the walls appeared, and wondering how they could ever have read their books by the light from the old lamps.

Further details of the Strachan family can be found in the publication 'Frank Ernest Strachan and a History of the Vineyard District New South Wales' Parts 1 and 2 by Alan Strachan.



Numbers 33 and 35 Richards Avenue in April 1995.

Photo: Rosemary Phillis