

Memories of Days now Gone

My name is Michael J. Clarke and what follows are some memories I have of where and when I spent the early days of my life, for I can recall much of those years with vivid clarity, almost although it was yesterday. It is strange that the mind will forget so much of what only this moment has passed, and yet will hold clear and bright the memory of what happened years ago, and of men and women now long since passed.

Of course many of the places I will mention are now gone, and with them many of my childhood friends with whom I shared such happy memories. Of those places and friends I can think of nothing better to commence these pages than this heading, although I remain aware of the very doubtful English.

“The Best Place I Ever Knew, Was The Place Where I Grew.”

The War Years

I don't know how old I was, perhaps only 3-4, but I have a few small memories of the home in which we first lived at Speers Point. The weatherboard house was on the Esplanade, about two hundred yards on the western side of Fairfax Road, and on a hill. The house was named “Why Worry.” I do remember we got our water from a corrugated iron tank, which was mounted on a stand adjacent to the back of the house.

I can recall my father measuring the quantity of water in the tank, by the number of rungs or corrugations. From other members of the family I have since learned that we lived there only a short time, but exactly how long I am not sure.

Then I found out we were shifting, which turned out to be to 9 The Esplanade, Speers Point, just about two hundred yards from the hotel. Many years later, the house number was changed to 200, and remains the same today (2007). I remember we were (my 3 brothers & 2 sisters, another sister came along later on) on the back of a truck, which I suppose also shifted the furniture from one house to the other.

Eventually the complete family tree consisted of my three brothers and sisters, they being Les (Gus), Paul, Veronica, Denis, Maureen and Anne. An older sister Mary had died in 1931 when she was about 6 months old and I never knew her.

Although the house fronted onto the Esplanade, we arrived at our location through two vacant blocks at the Speers Street entrance, which were later built on by Mr Jack Haggerston and Mr Bill Avis respectively.

My eldest brother Les, was nicknamed Gus and how that came about remains a mystery. He was a very popular youngster about the town, and everybody knew him by his nickname and I don't think anybody ever knew his baptismal name.

I don't know how it came about but well after he became old enough to vote he was placed on the Electoral Roll under two names, one being his correct Christian name Les and the other under his nickname of Gus.

I have no recollection of the war starting in 1939, but can clearly recall my mother going to the Council building, which was then on the corner of Main Road and

Council Street, one Saturday afternoon, to collect Ration Books for the issue of food and clothing,

The army camp was in Speers Point Park, with an abundance of barb-wire on show, especially on the waters edge. Incidentally the official name of the park was "Myers Park," with a nicely- painted sign over the entrance. An armed guard was stationed at the entrance, to what the locals referred to as "the big park." Every Sunday, Mum would make up an extra hot meal, which we would take to the guard, who in turn would often give us some army biscuits, which we couldn't eat, because they were much too hard for us youngsters.

The senior army officers did not stay in the park, and the local army headquarters were located in a large brick house, on the Esplanade, just west of Fairfax Road. It was an imposing looking place with large palm-trees in the front. It remains there still.

The soldiers were also camped on the quarry hill, overlooking Quarry Road, with an excellent view of the lake. There were searchlights positioned on the hill, with some large guns, which I think were anti-aircraft guns, but I was too young to know exactly, just what type they were.

During the war years, there was a dance held at Boolaroo on a Saturday night. I don't know if it was every Saturday or just every so often, but I do remember one night after a dance, a soldier, I don't know if he was a local or not, decided to walk back to Warners Bay over the hills. Somehow he got into difficulty, lost his way, fell over a hill and was killed. That would have been about 1942-1943.

I do remember that during those years of turmoil, my father, George Clarke, a tradesman Carpenter, was conscripted into an organisation known as the Commonwealth Construction Corps and was sent to different parts of the State where his services were needed. In that occupation he would be away from home for several weeks at a time. The whole family missed him dearly and eagerly looked forward to his return,

After starting at the Convent school in Seventh Street, Boolaroo, (again I'm not quite sure how old I was, but I think I may have been six), I remember at the 7.00am Sunday Mass, the Parish priest Father Heffernan asking for volunteers to dig the air-raid trenches in the school yard. Finally one was dug, and that was in a zig-zag pattern, and we were often drilled by the Sisters on how to enter and leave the trench. My recollection is that for much of the time the trench was half filled with water, so if we didn't get shot or bombed by a plane, there was always the possibility that we could have been drowned. Although the trench was filled in shortly after the war finished, the distinct outline of the trench is still visible today.

I recall that my writing implements in those very early school-days consisted of a "slate and a piece of chalk". The slate was bound with a wooden frame similar to a photo frame and was slightly smaller than an A4 page. I think my elder brothers and sister were all using exercise writing books at that time with a pencil, and pen with a nib and ink of course. Eventually as I progressed through those primary school-days I too, got to use a pen and ink. Biro-pens came into being when I was in 6th Class in

primary school, but we were not allowed to use them for some considerable time later on, as our teachers considered that the quality of our hand-writing suffered.

Even as very young children we were aware of just how serious the War was but we were still able to point a little finger of scorn at Hitler with our own little ditty which went:-

“Underneath the water six feet deep,
There lays Hitler fast asleep.
All the little fishes,
Tickle his feet,
Underneath the water six feet deep.”

Of course it was the law that every home had to have its own private air-raid shelter, with sand and bags being provided by the authorities, which I suppose was the local Council, for there were piles of sand on every vacant paddock, and of course we used to play in the sand, making castles and tunnels. The sand-bags were stacked about the entrance and other vulnerable parts of the shelters. Of course none of that serious war business was allowed to interrupt our enjoyment of playing in the sand heap, one of which was in a vacant paddock next to our front yard.

It was there in that sand-heap that my best mate Peter Haggerston broke his arm late one afternoon when somebody jumped on him while playing about. Although he went through the agony of a broken arm, we all thought he was a bit lucky because it got him off school for a few days.

We all went to school with a cork in our pocket or tied to a piece of string about our neck. Often the air-raid siren would sound, and we would dive under our desk with the cork clenched in our mouth, to prevent damage to our teeth. We might have been blown to bits, but with any luck, our teeth may have survived the ordeal.

As night fell we would listen for the sound of aircraft, and watched the searchlights from different vantage points focus on the plane, until satisfied it was not the enemy. Air-raid wardens, carrying their gas-masks, walked the streets of an evening making sure that lights from the homes were not visible to any aircraft or boats that may have been scanning the area. Windows were blacked out to prevent any lights been seen, and the windows had strips of glued paper attached to prevent the glass shattering and causing personal damage in case of explosions.

The air-raid siren at Speers Point was on a telegraph pole adjacent to the jetty and the entrance to what the locals called the “little park.” During the war years it was given a trial run every Sunday at 1.00pm, and strangely enough that practice continued for about a year after the war ended.

We were constantly warned by our teachers and adults against the dangers that may exist in picking up, what looked like lost objects, such as fountain pens etc. We were often told that they may explode, so we had to leave such items alone.

There were also plenty of posters about on the shop windows warning of spies and idle talk. “Loose lips sink ships” & “Japanese gentlemen listen near,” were all very

familiar to us children. I particularly remember the various posters on the front of Lindstrom's grocery store, which was just about 50 yards north of the Boolaroo Post Office. Even though we were only children, we knew not to ask where the fathers of our mates were stationed overseas, although sometimes they would volunteer that their father was in Great Britain, which could have been anywhere for all we knew.

At one time the Japanese must have been very close, for all the boats in the lake were confiscated, tied together and many were taken to the bay at Marmong Point ready to be burned. The line of boats came from the direction of Belmont and traced across the water like a huge snake. The same thing apparently happened in other areas of the lake too, so they were not all taken to Marmong. I don't know if the boats were ever actually burnt, but that certainly was the intention.

Of those war-years I recall one Sunday morning in particular, when an enormous number of soldiers came marching past our house. We ran to the corner of the Esplanade and Main Road and from there we could see to the hill near the Council. They were coming up Park Road, down the Main Road, and went out of sight on the bend past Thompson Road. Although there were always plenty of soldiers about, I had never seen so many before at the one time.

On the corner of The Esplanade and Main Road stood Reynold's Boarding House, shop, bakery and post office. It was a two storied building with an overhanging verandah, supported by large timber posts, which themselves were erected very close to the outward edge of the footpath. Time after time, the supports were hit by armoured cars or army trucks which sent the verandah swaying about, although I never saw it actually totally collapse, at times it must have been very close.

The army vehicles as well as the few private cars that were about the town had their tyres painted white, as well as a white stripe running the length of the running board, so that they could be seen more easily at night, for there were no street lights and cars were forbidden to have their headlights switched on.

Windows in the shops and homes were totally blacked out, with strips of glued paper being spread across the glass to prevent it flying and shattering should there be a bombing raid.

Rathmines air-base was fairly close by, so the sight of sea planes landing on the lake was a daily occurrence. The planes nearly always used to follow the line of the Main Road, down over the jetty, and land on the water. Very often, if it was a small plane, it would be manoeuvred close to the jetty, when the pilot and whoever was with him, would adjourn to the hotel for a few beers.

Of course the larger Catalina's landed there frequently too, but it's crew usually made their way to the local Hotel to the jetty by means of a small rubber dinghy, before they also, took refuge at the local hotel. The licensee at the time was Jack Vaughan and he remained so until Harold "Pippy" Wilkinson took over in 1949. "Pippy" was a very popular chap, a good soccer player and had represented Australia.

Our mothers were always listening for the planes and we could all pick the different aircraft by their sound. Sometimes the plane would come into view following the path down the Main Road, not landing on the lake as normal, but would circle around again. The second time, they would come in very low, perhaps only about 200 feet off the ground, and drop what we called “flour bombs.” When we knew the plane was going around again, we would grab a saucepan and spoon and run to the Main Road, to scoop up the flour, or at least try to do that, as sometimes the “bombs” broke and spread all over the road. This all probably sounds very strange now, but that was wartime and goods, such as the flour, were very scarce.

Nearly always the aircraft crew were spot on, the target being on the roadway in the area between the picture theatre and the hotel. It may seem strange now in 2014, that we would do such things, but times were very difficult, so it was really a worthwhile exercise. Only the centre of the road was tar-sealed, a lane on either side, which was edged by a piece of timber. From there, the rest was gravel to the edge of the gutter.

The Military Police were often about the place, driving around looking for some soldier who had gone AWOL. Though we were only children we always seemed to know when they would be about, and we were told by our mothers, that should they pull up and asked us had we seen “Mr So & So,” we were to say that we had not seen anything. Many a time though we knew that the man they wanted was sleeping in a neighbour’s house and he would be going back to his camp in a few days. The MP’s were regarded as the enemy.

Today we hear and see so much on TV about the stress suffered by soldiers returning home after serving in war zones overseas. But the real impact is not there for most of us and we don’t witness it first-hand. Well, during WW2 and for some time after some of us did have the horrible experience of seeing it.

I can recall, although I was very young, on occasion there may have been a back-fire from a car or the sudden roar of a fighter plane overhead. The noise so affected some returned men that they would scream and throw themselves into the gutter on the roadside for protection. There they would lay for some short time, shaking in a terrible fashion, and sometimes would stay where they were until given assistance by some adults.

“Shell-shock” was the common name given to the trauma and I witnessed that dramatic scene in all its dreadful rawness a few times in front of Scott’s shop and the picture theatre on the Main Road at Speers Point. Of course being young children we had no real understanding of what we were witnessing and were frightened ourselves to see such a spectacle. I often think of what those poor men must have suffered and gone through to protect us. Scott’s shop by the way was run by a brother and sister, Bill and Caroline Scott.

I have a view in my mind of Mr Tom Donohoe who lived in a small house near the bottom end of Lake View Street. He had three children, Jimmy, Patsy and Maureen (I think). Mr Donohoe was a tall man, and I always think of him as being like Gary Cooper, though whether he was or not, I cannot be sure, as I was only very young, and sometimes memories get distorted. I do remember the day he left home to go overseas

to the war. I was standing on our back verandah and watched as he left his house, and my Mum said to me, “that’s Mr Donohoe going off to war.” He never returned as he, Private Thomas Donohoe, of the 2/20 Australian Infantry Battalion was killed in Singapore on Monday 9th February 1942.

Later Mrs Donohoe moved to Boolaroo with her family. Many years later my wife and I were in Singapore and visited the Kranji War Cemetery and quite by chance we came across the headstone of Mr Donohoe. For me it was an awfully sad moment.

The Donohoe house at Speers Point became home to the Morris family, with Elaine, Maureen and Gary going to the Convent school. Later after they moved out after some years, the house was taken over by Freddy Alley, who had an amazing resemblance to the film actor Stewart Granger.

In the week leading up to Anzac Day 2011, the NMH had a register of all the Newcastle & Hunter Valley men who had been killed in the various wars. It detailed the death of Mr Donohoe. Now I know for certain that I found his grave site in the Krangi War Cemetery, Singapore when we were there once. I took a photo of his grave just on the off-chance that he was the correct “Tom Donohoe.”

I remember the day the war ended; it was Wednesday, August 15th, 1945. My mate Peter Haggerston and I were playing on the footpath outside his home in Speers Street, when around the corner from the Main Road, came two Telegram boys, Maxie Pearson and Max Cuthbert on their PMG-issued (Post Master General) pushbikes. They were flying along up Speers Street, with streamers tied to the seat of the bikes and they were shouting, “its over, its over, the war is over.” Peter and I were not at school that day as it was the Feast of the Assumption and Catholic Schools were having a holiday for what was then as now, a “Holy Day of Obligation.”

I have a most wonderful memory of the Australian soldiers, not doing anything special I suppose, but just walking down the street, and I would look at them and think how manly and wonderful they were. I thought nobody could have been any better, stronger or tougher than those majestic men. I don’t expect that they ever realised that I, the skinny little kid sitting on the edge of the gutter, thought just how great they were. I knew, and never doubted for a second, that with men like them protecting us, we were all so safe. In my boyish little mind, there was nobody like them then, as there have been none since. Now, many, many years have passed and I’am not a young boy any longer but I still think the same of them. They were simply magnificent then, and remain so today.

During the war there were Ration Books issued for just about everything, with petrol coupons required for every purchase. They were still in use for some years after the war ended and were still required until about 1951. At that time (1951) I was working in the Shell Garage at Speers Point, and now and again we received a few gallons extra when it was being delivered by the tankers. Measurement was not exact then as it is now, but we used a dip-stick to measure the quantity in the underground tank, and very often the tanker driver would say something like, ‘there’s a couple of gallons extra in there for your mates.’

The result was that often when the fellows wanted some petrol and didn't have a coupon we were able to help them out. On those occasions we were treated with great respect. I didn't understand why, when sometimes I would walk into one of the local shops and one of the men might be there and would ask if I would like a Coke. It was quite some time before I realised why they were doing that.

Some of the children who I recall going to the Convent school included:- Peter Haggerston, Bernie Berthold, Maxie Miller, Timmy Burns, Denis & Margaret Murnain, Ronnie & Shirley Ford (twins), Patsy Donohue, The Feighans from Warners Bay (Betty, Barbara, Dickie & their cousins Pat & Theresa), Esma Tennant, Alan Rooke, the Grogans from Argenton (Mick, Jim, Brian & Phil), Carl & Brian Gesell & their cousins Vince, Alan & Trevor, Jacquie & Barbara Haggerston, Rae Roper and Faith, Edna & "Fifty" Dillon, John Smart & his sister Marie, Greg, Frances & Yvonne Guilfoyle all from Teralba, Mary, Jimmy & Bertie Odgers from Warners Bay.

Others from the about the town included: Barry Alley, Barry Dennett, Adrian, Leo & Alan Crameri, twins Paul & Michael Turner, Merv Sherring, Maureen & Janice Robertson, John & Mattie Shaw, Stuart McEwan, David Valance, the Paddock boys, Harold Harragon, while many others have slipped through my memory net.

The Convent School

The Convent School was a three-room-weatherboard building, with a corrugated-iron roof, and stood behind the old Catholic Church in Seventh Street, Boolaroo, and was opened for business in 1939. I can remember my mother attending the opening. Before the school was built, the then-Church was used as a school, the children being taught by the Sisters of St Joseph. All my brothers and sisters went there, and I think I must have started there in 1940, although I'm not quite sure about the year. Besides the local children, others came from Toronto, Teralba, Argenton and Warners Bay.

Before classes started all the pupils stood to attention in the school playground (or were supposed to). There every morning we sang the National Anthem which then was "God Save the King" and often in class we sang "God Bless Our Lovely Morning Land, Australia." I can recall some of the words:-

"There's a land where the sun shines nearly every day,
It's the land of the kangaroo.
Where the folks are happy as the day is long,"
And there's lots of work to do,
Where the soft wind blows,
And the gum-trees grow,
As far as the eye can see,
Australia, son of the Motherland,
Australia is the land for me.

PM at Boolaroo

On Wednesday 28th October 1953, the then-Prime Minister of Australia Bob Menzies visited Boolaroo and spoke to a gathering of businessmen in the Central Hall, which was located on the Main Road. At that time I was working for a contractor, J. R. Pillars Pty Ltd within the premises of the nearby Sulphide Corporation. The day's

work was over and in company with another local chap Tommy Stone, (This was not the Tommy Stone mentioned later who owned the fish-shop) I was riding my bike through the town. Tommy and I were riding two abreast, and as we neared the Hall, the PM's car pulled out from the kerb without any warning, nearly causing a collision. Tommy went to the right and I went to the passenger's side of the car, there to find an unrepentant PM glaring at me as if I had no right to exist on the same planet as himself.

I was not overjoyed either, and let him and his driver know what I thought about the situation. There were very few people about, probably only 6-7 including the local policeman. It was as close as I ever got to be PM. I have since been assured that at the time of his birth, the PM's parents were married, although I did have some serious doubts on that particular day and for some considerable time after.

Horse Troughs

Horses were very much in use about the area until well into the 1950's. A drinking trough for the horses was available on the north side of Speers Street, Speers Point, opposite what was then the residence of Mr & Mrs Arthur Dennett, 5 Speers Street. There were another two such troughs in Boolaroo, one near Sweets Wine Bar (Talamini's) on the corner of Main Road and Sixth Street, the other on the Main Road opposite Frith's Store.

Dry Cleaning Business Comes to Boolaroo

In the late 1940's, probably about 1948-49, Herbie Taylor an ex-employee of the well-known Newcastle tailor Arthur Dodd, in the west-end of Newcastle, established a thriving dry cleaning business on the western side of the Main Road, Boolaroo. Previous to the establishment of Herbie's enterprise, locals had to have their dry cleaning needs attended to through various agents, who would then send the goods off to one of the dry cleaning businesses in Newcastle, such as the Sports Dry Cleaning Company. Even Bill Melliush, at the Shell Garage, Main Road, Speers Point, was one such agent for the Company just named.

Boolaroo Wine Bar

Sweet's Wine Bar, was located on the south-west corner of Main Road and Sixth Street, Boolaroo. It was a dark-dimly lit place, and didn't appear to attract many customers. However it operated there for many years, so it must have been doing ok. I recall, there was one well known old chap Mr Jones, who used to drive past our place on the Esplanade in his horse and sulky on his way to have a tipple or two. Some of the older-lads used to play some dreadful tricks on Mr Jones, with his horse and sulky.

What I do remember quite clearly was that anyone attending a wine bar in those days was look upon with some suspicion. Being only young, I didn't understand why that was so and still don't, but I can recall people saying :- "yes, and he goes to the wine bar, you know." Now things are all different, and it is now a sign of social hierarchy to be able to trot out a few thoughts on the merits or otherwise of a new wine.

Of course there was another wine bar on the Esplanade at Warners Bay, run by the Feighan family and still another at what was then, "The Crossroads," and now Glendale.

Boolaroo Post Office

The first Postmaster I can remember was a Mr Greig who lived in Seventh Street, Boolaroo. The house was on the south side of the street, just a touch lower than where the Police Station is at present. Mr & Mrs Greig had a son John who was handicapped. Every so often Mrs Greig would have the need to go shopping in Newcastle and she would leave John with us at the school because we were about his age and we did look after him. He used to play all our games and we never treated him any differently to any of our other school friends, which was probably a touch unfortunate for John, but who really knows and thinking back, all those years later, perhaps it was good for him.

Mr Greig's place was taken by Mr Roy Roper who came to the town from Moss Vale. That would have been in the early 1940's. There were eventually five Roper children, three of whom attended the convent school at the same time as myself, but were in different classes to me. They were Faith, Rae and Ken. Later on Robert and Margaret came along too. Robert was a great rugby league player with a junior side at Boolaroo before playing first-grade with Toronto in the Newcastle competition.

The telephone exchange was then part of the GPO and several local girls worked there at one time or another, because it was all manually operated in those days. Some of the young ladies who worked there included Joan and Colleen McGauran, Faith and Rae Roper, and Jackie Haggerston.

Porpoises in the Lake

We lived right on The Esplanade so we only had to run across the road to be in the lake for a swim, fishing or prawning. As children we were always in the water, and being with my three older brothers and elder sister, I cannot remember a time when I couldn't swim. We practically lived in the lake, and when we were not swimming we were on the jetty (known locally as the "big jetty") or about it somewhere. In those early years (the early 1940's) there were always plenty of porpoises to be seen, not far from the shore, perhaps 200 yards away, but certainly not more. So we got a very good view of them frolicking about. There were probably six or seven of them at a time, but gradually they vanished. I don't know the reason they went, but suppose that maybe the lake got too polluted for them to remain.

Harriet James

One of the real identities about Speers Point was Miss Harriet James who lived at 169 Main Road, with her Mum and brother Tom. Harriet was well-known in the town as a dress-maker, a trade at which she was reputed to be rather excellent. Harriet was much older than us children and we always called her "Miss James."

There were games we played as children with cotton-reels which involved securing a rubber band through the hole in the centre of the reel, fixing it at one end, while at the other end we twisted with a match or some other small piece of wood. When we released it the cotton-reel would take off for a few yards, and we would start all over again.

Anyway our Harriet was a great source of cotton-reels and used to save them for us. It seems now that it was a fairly frequent exercise to call in to her house on the way home from school. We would (2-3 of us) go to her back door, and the bravest one amongst us would knock on the door. When Harriet appeared she would be asked: "please Miss James, do you have any cotton-reels for us?" Thinking back, it must have been like the story of Oliver Twist to her, us children turning up and asking for more. She was always very obliging and friendly to us. Later as the years passed we all got a little older and by that time we were allowed to call her "Harriet." She was always a really lovely lady and still well-remembered with great affection.

Angus Orchard

Immediately on the northern side of the James' residence stood a block of land, which remained vacant until about 1948-1949, when a weatherboard-house was built on it by Mr and Mrs Angus Orchard, who were a very friendly couple. I don't know much about them, but do remember when their daughter Gail was born. I think they may have come from the Cessnock area but am not sure if that is correct or not.

Quite by accident I met Gail Orchard in the Newcastle Library where she worked about 2005. The children about the Point were in some awe of Angus, and we thought he was quite famous as he used to write comic-books although I cannot recall now just what characters he had in them. However, apparently the comics were popular.

National Anthem

It seems now that every social occasion required the National Anthem to be sung. In those days, it was "God Save our King", and we sung it, if not in tune, then with a great deal of enthusiasm, and always standing at attention. At the pictures, (it was never called "the movies", as that was something they had in America), the anthem was played before the film was shown and of course everybody stood, or if perhaps if that wasn't possible, such as with a very old person, they would remain seated, but with head bowed in honour of the King. It was a great show of respect towards him, but perhaps more than that, for the world and the British Empire had in recent years, been through a terrible period of it's existence, through WW2, and was now, just slowly setting itself on the path of recovery. But people did not have to remember, for it had all happened too recently, too soon to allow the mind to forget.

People then, were still bound together in a patriotic unity which might now be hard to imagine, but they did care for one another. There was no talk then of Australia becoming a Republic or changing the flag to suit the whim of some newly-elected politician or a recent arrival from some foreign land. We were British citizens then and proud of it. For some time now we have not been British subjects, but citizens of Australia, the greatest country in the world. No country on earth is perfect, all having something we don't agree with, but if you have come here from overseas, then accept Australia and Australians as we are. There is no centre ground:-"Love it or leave it."

Sirens at the Pits

Butter in eyes & the Dag, Miners on wages & contract,

The sirens at the local mines, mainly Stockton Borehole at Cockle Creek and the Pacific at Teralba were heard quite clearly over the local district. At 7.10am the first whistle of the day blew, indicating the start of the day's shift. That was only part of it's use, for then the local house-wives would check the kitchen clock against the time of the first whistle. Again at 3.10pm the knock off whistle blew to end the day's work, and before long a few of the men appeared, still carrying plenty of coal dust on themselves, riding their push bikes, with tin- water bottles and lunch tins slung over their shoulder, on their way home.

Then there were the other whistles which seem to come all too frequently. A sudden dreadful wail came, dominating the atmosphere, giving notice to all that a serious or fatal accident had occurred. There were very few phones in those days, but certainly the local Ambulance Station at Boolaroo would have had one, but even then the quickest notification that urgent assistance was needed would have been by the use of the siren. Contact by phone was slow in comparison to the siren, for the local telephone operator first had to be contacted by cranking a handle, getting through to her, before being put through to the person at the other end. It was cumbersome in comparison to modern communications but that is just the way things were in those days.

One of the strange things that caught my attention at those tragic times was that, although there were very few phones about, even in business and definitely even fewer in private homes, just how quickly the news of a death at one of the mines became known among the mothers and housewives. It was all telegraph stuff, told over the fence, travelling from one backyard to another. Details of who the victim was and their family circumstances all seem to become known in no time at all.

It may seem strange now, but in those days, there were types of miners, those on day-wages and others working on a contract basis. Those on contract stopped work when they had completed their quota ("Dag" it was known as) while those on wages finished at 3.10pm.

Bissett's Paper Shop

The paper shop is still located on the same site (2012) as when owned by Mr & Mrs Bissett. They were an English couple who seemed to be there forever. Mr Bissett had a little Austin car and morning and evening he could be seen driving up and down each street throwing the newspapers into the homes. For the late edition of the Newcastle Sun would be picked up from Cockle Creek Station from the train which arrived at 5.50pm and then taken to Speers Point. When the Bissett's retired they built a nice weatherboard house in Bell Street, their neighbour being Miss Webb, a good friend of Harriet James.

Eventually, it probably was about 1950, that Mr & Mrs Ralph King took over the business and ran it for many years. They were very nice people. Ralph had been a speedway rider at one time. Mrs King was a Hawkins, but I do not know if she was a

daughter or niece of Albert Hawkins. Sadie, Mrs King's sister, worked for them in the shop and was very popular with everyone. She used to ride her pushbike from Boolaroo each morning. Sadie was a fair bit older than us and she to "mother us" a bit when we went into the shop.

Circus in Town

I don't remember the name of the first circus I can recall coming to Speers Point, but the tent was erected on a vacant paddock, located next door to Bissett's paper shop, on the northern side. Tex Morton and Dave Meekin performed there. Dave Meekin had once been a very handy, tough boxer about the same time as Les Darcy. Meekin, according to the advertising posters of the day, was said to be the greatest lion-tamer in the world. The circus would arrive by marching through the street, with colourful trucks and cages, and so it seemed, quite a lot of banging on a drum.

We children always seemed to know when the elephants would arrive at Cockle Creek Station. They often did not arrive in town with the general team of the circus, but came to the station by train where they were unloaded. The other location used for the circus was what was locally known as the Ambulance paddock, being the land on the north side of the Ambulance Station at Boolaroo.

Mrs Wheeler's Refrigerator

Among the children at my school at Boolaroo were the Wheelers, (Kevin, Marion, Lesley & Peggy) who lived at Speers Point, on the Main Road, the house being located on the same site where the first RSL Club eventually came into being. A chap by the name of Lionel Morgan was the Secretary/Manager there for some time, and he had married one of the Hansons who lived in Albert Street. She was "Sock" Hansons sister. "Sock" was one of the well-known locals and was a harmless larrikin, who didn't mind a drink on a hot day.

We were all anxious to make sure we kept in good books with the Wheeler children, mainly because their mother, Mrs Wheeler had a refrigerator, the first one I can remember, and she always seem to have a ready supply of blue coloured ice blocks on hand for us. We were frequent visitors. Mrs Wheeler probably never realised just how famous she was to us children, but she was our hero. We didn't know about "heroines" in those days. It was sad day for us when the Wheelers moved to New Lambton.

Earth Tremor at Marmong Point

One day during the summer of 1950, while I was working at the Shell Garage at Speers Point, there was suddenly what sounded like a very loud explosion. We rushed out of the garage into the street to see what had happened, as it was a very dramatic event. People were running out of their homes into the street. From where we were we had a clear view of Marmong Point, and we could see large clouds of billowing dust rising in the air. Mrs Mary Stuart who lived opposite the garage came running across to us (me and Jimmy Summons who operated the garage) and was quite agitated, asking; "what is it Jimmy" ? What has happened? Well Mr Summons had no more idea than anybody else, as nothing like that had ever occurred before there, or at least not to anyone's knowledge.

Steel's, the Boatbuilders

The Steel family lived on the southern side of Speers Street, Speers Point, next door to Smith's general store, which itself was on the south-east corner of Speers Street and Albert Street. Steel's boatshed where they built their yachts etc, was at the rear of the home, with an unnamed lane (now Leyton Street) running behind their premises. It was always a great local event when they would launch a new boat and always attracted a large audience, including many children, which looking back, must have caused great concern for fear of one of the kids been hurt. I'm not sure of Mr Steel's name but his son was Barry, and was always referred to as "young Barry", so Mr Steel (senior) may have been a "Barry" too.

They would come out through the lane already mentioned, into Albert Street, then make their way down Speers Street to the Main Road, take a left turn down past Oughton's Billiard Room to the right-hand side of the jetty which was about 200 yards away. At that point on the edge of the lake was a short incline with railway lines onto which they would manoeuvre the boat. There was always much pushing and shoving, with plenty of instructions being shouted to the few men who were helping out. Anyway, it was always a great event, and we loved the atmosphere of the whole day.

Mrs Rees

Mrs Rees lived on the north-west corner of Speers & Albert Street, Speers Point. She was a teacher for many years at the Public School, Boolaroo. Of course we all knew and respected her very much. She was a very gentle, lovely (old) lady. At least we all thought of her as being old. We used to catch the bus every weekday (fare to Boolaroo was one penny) from the bus stop in front of Scott's shop on the Main Road, and would watch Mrs Rees as she walked down the road to catch the same bus as ourselves.

On her arrival we would all stand and say:- "Good morning Mrs Rees." I don't know how they managed to know but if someone had not shown the respect due to Mrs Rees by standing and saying "good morning," the Sister at school always used to know and would asked during the course of the morning:- "who was the person who was impolite to Mrs Rees this morning"?

Mrs Rees had a son Alan, who was about 5-6 years older than us. He was a real nice chap and later in life became the Safety Officer at the Sulphide Corporation, and he married a local girl called Shirley Marston, who lived at the top of Speers Street. We considered Shirley to be quite famous for as far as we were concerned she had the greatest job in the world, being an usherette at the Strand Theatre in Newcastle, which meant that she got to see all the latest pictures, and for free. How lucky can you get?

Boolaroo Fire Station **Main Road & Fourth Street**

This was a meeting place for several of the men about the town of Boolaroo. They included Ken Sanders, Joe Walters (after whom one of the local sporting fields is named and Bob Hughes, who also was a staunch supporter of the Boolaroo Rugby Union team. Of course there were several others but I cannot remember them now. Their meeting resembled the style of how men would meet in the local Billiard Room

to have a yarn and spin a few tall stories. The fellows, who were all members of the local Fire Brigade would meet at the station several nights during the week.

Albert Hawkins & Sons

Corner of Main Road & Fourth Street, Boolaroo

When we were growing up Mr Hawkins was reputed to be the owner of the largest privately-owned earth-moving business in the Southern Hemisphere. The phone number was Boolaroo 7, a number which had to be gained through the Boolaroo Exchange which was housed in the Boolaroo Post Office, corner of Main Road and Seventh Street, Boolaroo. That building also had the Post Office Boxes within its perimeters. Mail for Mr. Hawkins came to him via P.O. Box 3, Boolaroo.

I do not know how many people were employed by Mr Hawkins, but they ran into a large number, including some of his sons, all of whom were grown men when I was a small boy. Between them and a chap named Joe Crameri (the greatest mechanic in the world) they were responsible for one of the most embarrassing moments of my life. Well, several moments actually. It happened that in 1966 I joined the Dept of Labour and Industry and the very first task given to me was to visit the premises of Albert Hawkins & Sons at Boolaroo.

The Dept was having a purge of businesses that had cranes or earth-moving machinery that required the operators to have Certificates of Competency, which they received after undergoing an examination. So I was supposed to examine these men that had been operating all types of machinery when I was still a school-child. Well, I thought it would be an easy time for me, but they were having none of that, and embarrassed the “hell” out of me, addressing me as “Mr Inspector” and having a good laugh at my expense. Anyway it was all good fun on their part, but I’ll never forget that day and think that I have now just about forgiven them.

Freddy Studden

Freddy Studden was in my class all the way through primary school. Fred had suffered from infantile paralysis all his life and had leg-irons of his legs. Still that didn’t stop him playing in all the games we played at school, cricket, football (of a sort) and “Red Rover.” I recall none of us ever gave him any favours, nor did he give any, but he was a mighty fierce competitor. His mother was an American lady. While we were in primary school his father died, I suppose we might have been in Fifth Class at that time. Later Fred worked in Newcastle and became very proficient as a photographer. At one time he was the President of the NSW Scuba Diving Association. He had a younger brother John, who could do handstands and made it look so easy. It was something I tried a thousand times, but sadly with no success.

South Sydney Rugby League Team

From about 1946 to 1950 my father George Clarke, who was the secretary of Lake Macquarie Rugby League Football Club, would arrange for the South Sydney team to come up over a weekend. They would then play a match against the local team which was played on the soccer oval at Speers Point on a Sunday afternoon. The soccer oval was a much better ground than the local league ground. At that time all the matches in Sydney were played on a Saturday, there being no such thing as Sunday football, and indeed there were many in the community that considered it not the right thing to be

doing on a Sunday, which was seen as a day of rest and quiet. During those years I can recall officials of South Sydney, Percy Horne and George Ball stopping with us, listening to them reciting stories about some of the great players that had in their Club.

Tommy Burns

Tommy Burns, was the Welterweight Champion of Australia (1947-1949) and was an extremely popular sporting figure in Australia. He was also a very keen golfer. At one stage someone told me (when I was very young) that he had been seen about the town, but I really didn't think much about, reasoning I suppose, that people such as he just didn't come to places like Speers Point.

However I was very wrong for many years later I come to know Tommy fairly well, and on one occasion, my wife Delma and I had taken him for lunch at Narrabeen and Tommy started talking about the lovely places he had seen in his lifetime. To our surprise he mentioned Speers Point and how he had stopped at Reynolds' Boarding House, (on the corner of Main Road and The Esplanade) when he would come up and play golf at The Waratah Golf Links, at Cockle Creek.

He went on to tell us that he had never seen anything as beautiful while standing on the balcony of Reynolds and looking at the lake from which he would have gained a superb view. He got quite a surprised when we let him know that we had lived only a 100 yards from where he had stopped.

VJ Dinghy Club Shed on the Lake

First thing to mention is the location of the original boatshed for the VJ's at Speers Point. The easiest way to describe it's position is this:- If you came down Alley Street on a bike towards the lake and went across The Esplanade you would land on the roof of the boatshed or where it had originally been.

The VJ dinghy races were run on a Sunday afternoon and took in 3 laps of the course, always finishing at a point near the "big jetty." There was many a great finish to the line, some of them unbelievably close, with the front of VJ's surging well out of the water, almost making a swell similar to that of a speedboat.

Although there were many good boats and sailing crews, (2 men) one of my favourites was "Mercia" with the crew being Cec Brownlow and Cecil Ebbeck. I think they provided many more exciting races usually putting on a spectacular show for the finish line which was right in front of our place.

I think it was early in the 1950s that the Dinghy Club closed the original boatshed and built new premises on the foreshore of the lake, going down towards the end of the "little park," behind a garden rockery which was soon dismantled. It was at this Club shed that Ben Lexcen of America's Cup fame became a member and learned much of his sailing expertise.

Reynold's Boarding House

Joe Reynold's shop was a Boarding house, Bakery and Post Office. It was located on the corner. of the Main Road and the Esplanade. The PO part of the business was run by Mrs Mary Stuart, daughter of Mrs Reynolds. I think Mrs Reynolds had been

married before (but I'm not sure of that) when she was known as Mrs Bully. She also had daughters Lillian and Mrs Kemp.

Mrs Kemp was married to Joe Kemp who was quite famous about the town for never dressing in anything else but a navy blue singlet. That was winter and summer. In fact it was of some moment if he was ever seen in anything else but his famous singlet. If Joe was seen in anything else other than his singlet it became a real talking point and people would mention that they had seen "Joe Kemp in a suit," Well it must have been for a funeral or something far out of the ordinary.

Besides that business, Joe Reynolds had an additional sideline, taking his pies and cakes to the Sulphide Corporation and Cardiff Railway Workshops. Mrs Mary Stuart lived opposite the Shell Garage on the Main Road. I remember her serving customers and calling to her sister Lillian to "get two of mother's pies," in a broad -English accent.

Mrs Stuart and her daughter also named Lillian had beautiful olive skin. Lillian married Colin Marshall who was killed while re-roofing a building within the premises of the Sulphide Corporation. He was killed when a gust of wind blew him off the roof while he was holding a large asbestos corrugated sheet.

Nurse Hawkins Maternity Hospital

I suppose Nurse Hawkins was related to Albert Hawkins but I have no way of confirming that one way or the other. Her hospital was located opposite the Shell Garage, not immediately opposite, but across the road and then up two houses towards Council Street. I can remember visiting a Mrs Stone there who had given birth to a baby boy who she called Robert. The only other baby I know who was born there was Peter Lydiard, to Robert and Joy Lydiard (Frost). Robert Lydiard or Bobby as he became known, was the eldest son of Mrs Ivy Lydiard, who some years later became my mother-in-law.

Shell Garage

The Shell Garage was located on the Main Road, at the bottom of what we called "the Council Hill." It was owned by Harry Bond of Marmong Point, who I believed was the original occupier of the Garage. The first person I know who ran the Garage was a chap called Jimmy Summons, to whom I was later apprenticed as a Motor Mechanic. I can recall Harry Bond coming across the lake from Marmong Point by boat, tying it up at the jetty, and walking up the street to collect the rent from Jimmy Summons and later on Bill Melliush, who took over the business from Jimmy Summons.

Bill Melliush was a great speedway rider, having represented Australia many times in Tests against the British teams who came here. Bill at one time was a prominent member of a speedway team in London and had to stay there for part of WW2, during which time he was employed in the Fire Brigade, the Germans making sure there was no shortage of work in that regard.

Harold Light was the promoter of Speedway in Newcastle and Maitland at the time. Bill was such a star-rider that I know he was paid £40 (\$80) to be a part of the program on a Saturday night. He was always at me to go with him to see him race but

I only went once or twice. There were always plenty of well known riders who stopped at the Melliush's after the speedway meets, and included Aub Lawson, Vic Duggan and Lionel Van Pragg, all stars from Sydney and famous throughout Australia and the world.

I remember them most though for the amount of empty wine bottles they left lying about, and I would hurry to work on a Monday morning to pick up the bottles and get rid of them. Drinking wine was not done much in those days, and anyone doing so was looked on as a bit of a no-hoper.

The garage had petrol pumps for Plume, Ampol, Shell and Caltex. Mostly though petrol was only purchased from one tanker and pumped into which ever tank was getting a bit low. Some of the car drivers would only use one particular brand and none other. Little did they realise that what they were getting was all the same product.

My first job of a morning was to fill a large stone jar with water. It was ordinary tap water, but was sold as distilled water which people would use to put in the battery of their car. This sold for 2 shillings and threepence (23 cents) for a large bottle, which was the size of a large cordial bottle or 1 shilling and threepence (15 cents) for a small bottle, which was the size of a small cordial bottle. One old chap Mr John Sneddon, who was the Mines Inspector, often would come in to buy a bottle. He was a lovely old Scotsman, and I used to really hate to see him being taken down for his money.

I would say to him :- "Mr Sneddon, why don't you just use tap water, you can get that at home for nothing?" I can still see giving me a smile and replying :- "Michael, when you are a little older you will realise that distilled water is the life of the battery." Well, you can only try. Mr Sneddon lived next door to the Rowan family (Martin & Mrs Rowan & son Len) in Barford Street, Speers Point.

Another real low act especially from Jimmy Summons was to take fellows down when he had not done any real work on their car. It went like this. Frequently because of the poor arrangements with the in-ground petrol tanks a certain amount of water would find its way into the petrol tank of the car, and it would not start.

The supposed remedy was to remove the tank from the car and drain it out and then replace it, with fresh fuel. If that had been done it was a time-consuming and costly exercise. However, that hardly ever happened, and what did occur was this. The steel straps and bolts holding the tank were brushed up nice and clean with a wire brush and made to look fresh by dabbing some grease on the bolts. Then about a cup of methylated spirits would be poured into the tank, the metho mixing with the water and whatever fuel was in there and the motor attempted to be started.

It all involved a fair bit of spluttering by the motor but in no time the engine was running smoothly. The whole task from start to finish would only take about 10 minutes, but when payment time arrived the poor fellow who owned the car was told an exhaustive story of what a battle they had to go through to take the tank off, replace it, fill the tank with petrol and get the motor running.

Petrol Rationing

After WW2 petrol rationing was the order of the day until (I think) 1949, and petrol could only be bought if you had a ration ticket and I'm sure the gallons you could buy was limited. Then for a short while the rationing was abandoned, only to be brought back in by the Federal Government under Prime Minister Bob Menzies.

At that time there was great disruption in the country caused by the Communist Party whose members led crippling strikes in the coal mines, the wharves and the BHP Steel Works in Newcastle. Things got so bad that electricity supply to households was cut to a minimum and also to industry. At the garage the cut to electricity was so severe that we could only use the petrol pumps for certain periods, until it got so bad that we could not use them at all and had to have a manual-hand-operated pump installed.

I recall that the chap that drove the Shell tanker (Jack Corrigan) would sometimes let too much petrol go into our tanks. There was no really exact means of measuring what amount came out of the Shell tanker, but he would sometimes say:- "I think you have probably got 3-4 gallons too much, so if you have a mate who hasn't got a ration ticket you might be able to help him out.

Somehow the few motorists that were around the town always seem to know about this, as a result when I was on my way home after work, I would often stop at the Owen's local corner shop to get a small bottle of Coke (4 pence) (4 cents). Sometimes one of the men would say:- "I'll shout you a drink, don't you worry about that." I thought I was very important and didn't realise for some time after that their generosity was only extended to me because they thought I could help out with a few gallons of petrol, which I did a few times.

Those were the days just as the "one brand" Service Stations were coming into being, and the Shell Company representatives came to see Melliush a few times before he came to terms with them agreeing to sell only their product. They painted the exterior of the old building (only the front), the rest being corrugated iron on the remaining 3 sides. It was still a pretty crummy old place to work and was extremely hot in the summer.

The Postman

Hail, rain or shine, the post was delivered twice a day, once about 9.00am (at our place) and then again in mid-afternoon. The postman came by foot and always blew his whistle to signal his arrival. Then he also delivered the mail on Saturday morning, so we had plenty of service in that regard, a little different now that we have all the advantages of a modern society, with it sometimes been quicker to start a rumour and let it do the rounds, rather than use the less-than-efficient modern mail services.

Water Board Man.

I'm not quite certain just what the man from the Water Board did during his daily working hours, but he was always about the town riding here and there with the bag which carried his working tools, being attached to the bar of his Hunter District Water Board bike.

Charlie the Chinaman

For as long as I can remember Charlie the Chinaman would arrive at our house on a fairly regular basis carrying a large suitcase packed full of goods. This was carried with a stick over his shoulder and it always looked so very heavy. I don't know how old he was but if someone had told me he was 200 I would have believed them, as he always walked with a shuffle. It was always on a Saturday morning when he would arrive at our place after travelling out from Newcastle where he lived. He often would tease me and say:- "you not married yet?" I probably was only about 10 at the time.

He and my Mum always shared in a 6 shilling lottery ticket and done that every time he visited, but they never won a penny together in all those years. However I think he either won the lottery by himself or at least shared in a win 2-3 times over that period. Eventually he informed us that he was finishing in the business and going home to China. It was a really sad moment for us for he was part of the furniture and we had all known Charlie since we were little children.

Charlie informed us that his place was being taken by "young George" who turned out to be over 60, who also lived in Newcastle. "Young George" came on the same regular basis but it was never quite the same and we missed "Our Charlie."

Joanie Bancks and Ginger Meggs

When we were growing up one of the popular comics was "Ginger Meggs" and was produced in colour on the front page of the comics included in one of the Sunday papers. While I was at primary school the classes were mixture of boys and girls. One day Sister Monica (our class teacher) stood us up and said she was going to go around the room and ask each child if they had someone famous in their family such as a policeman, a carpenter, a mayor or any such thing of importance. A few kids told their little story and that was all fine until Sister came to me and I told the class that my uncle was a priest. (Remember this was a Catholic school).

Sister was very pleased and I thought I was a mile out in front of the rest of the class in the prestige stakes until Joanie Bancks was asked for her input. She then floored all of us by telling the class that her uncle was the man who wrote "Ginger Meggs." Well all my "previously faithful friends" got real excited at that announcement and started asking her questions about her uncle, and my status in the class dropped dramatically, including Sister Monica's. I have often thought how much a good hit-man would cost, but I suppose its all a bit late now, and Joanie is probably unaware of what she had done to ruin my short-lived prestige.

Mr Jock Cuthbert

Mr Cuthbert was the boot-maker in Boolaroo and had his business on the Main Road opposite Coughlin's paper shop. (I didn't know what a newsagent was in those days). He lived on the corner of Speers Street and Albert Street, Speers Point. There were two children that I remember, Maxie and Helen, but I'm not sure that there may have been an elder brother. Max was at one stage one of the local Telegram boys and many years later became a ship-wright and was employed by Garnock's at Port Kembla where I met up with him once again. He was a really nice chap and was about 8 years older than me.

Back to Mr Cuthbert the boot-maker. We would all catch the government bus from Speers Point to Boolaroo each morning to take us to school. When we got off the bus I would run up to Mr Cuthbert's and go through the morning papers to see if there were any boxer's photos in any of them. If there were I would run back after school and get them from him. If I missed a day or two he would save them for me.

I still have many of them to this day (2015) and often think of him and what a lovely old man he was to me. Several years later in life I wrote a number of books on Australian Boxing, but I never ever forgot the debt that I owed Mr Cuthbert for his kindness to me who must have driven him "bonkus" pestering him for those paper clippings and photos.

Mr Cuthbert had a Scottish accent you could cut with a knife, being very broad and deep. Well after he retired he had a little car and one day while in Newcastle, he attempted to go across a rail-crossing (at the Civic crossing) and was hit by a train, with the car being completely wrecked, but he escaped with only slight abrasions.

In Boolaroo there was also another bootmaker by the name of Mr Collins, who carried out repairs in a shed at his home which was on the south side of Fourth Street, up past Lakeview Road.

The Kiosk in Speers Point Park

During the summer months the park was always full especially on a Saturday and Sunday when picnic crowds would arrive from all over the district. Frequently many of the picnics consisted of folk from the coal mines of the Hunter Valley. The first occupiers of the Kiosk (I can recall) was Joe Reynolds (of Boarding House fame), then the Bosiers who came from Newcastle, then finally (in my time) Barry Judd who was a local boy from Boolaroo.

The Kiosk was a centre piece of life in the park and the place was a hive of activity with brass bands often playing, marching down the middle of the park and generally taking pride of place. Frequently the Scottish Bands with bagpipes blazing away got to do their stuff providing much joyful entertainment. In addition to them was the Carnival, with its Merry-Go-Round and other various rides and sideshows.

It was a great place to be and a lot of fun. There was also the Swimming Club who conducted races in the baths and were organised by Jerry Roberts, a local man who lived in Speers Street. Further entertainment was provided by Arthur Rootsey of Boolaroo who played the latest records over a loud speaker system and conducted concerts in the park. Mr Rootsey, who also managed the picture theatre in Boolaroo, would bring his records to the park in a specially made container on his pushbike.

If the weather was inclement that didn't necessarily put a damper on things, for Mr Rootsey made good use of the local Rotunda which was roofed. All these people contributed a great deal to the joy and social pleasure of so many, but I doubt very much if they ever realised just what a great contribution they made. Mr Rootsey and others of his ilk were simply just very good people.

HCB Electric

This was an electrical business which started in 1948 that set up premises in an old shop on the corner of Main Road and Sixth Street, Boolaroo. Originally it consisted of three partners Mr Jack Haggerston, Dave Crawford and Cec Brownlow, with Mrs Alice Haggerston as company secretary. They had all been electricians at the Sulphide Corporation when they decided to go into business for themselves.

After some time Mr Haggerston became the sole owner, with Crawford and Brownlow dropping out. The first apprentices were Peter "Pip" Haggerston (son of Jack) and Kenny Edwards. Mr Haggerston lived at 7 Speers Street (88 in 2011), and worked very hard to make the business a real success. After Peter had finished his apprenticeship he left the family business and worked at Wangi Wangi Power Station for the NSW Electricity Commission to gain some further experience. He was only there a year or two before returning to work for his father, and later when Mr Haggerston died, Peter took over the running of HCB Electric and did that for many years, with his mother and four sisters all being shareholders in the business. Mrs Alice Haggerston, collapsed and died in their little shop.

George Roberts, the Barber

George Roberts was the local barber at Speers Point for as long as I can remember. George lived in Cooks Hill and journeyed out to the Point every day by bus. His business was in part of the building owned by Mr Oughton and included the Billiard Room and another room fronting onto the Main Road where a Mr Jackson ran a Real Estate business, before he was drowned while holidaying in Queensland. A short time later Vic Davis from Belmont ran his own Real Estate business from the same room. At the rear of the building was another room where "Hoot" Gibson used to sleep. "Hoot" spent his time either in the Billiard Room or "Pippy" Wilkinson's hotel which was immediately opposite, where he was the odd job man.

I can remember getting my hair cut by George (who had a bit of a limp) when I was really young, so small in fact that George had a board that he placed across the arms of the chair for me to sit on so that he could get at me with some comfort. It was really was a meeting place for the men of the town to congregate and present their collective knowledge to the world on just about any subject. Talk about "pub politicians."

There was a door between the Billiard Room and the Barber Shop which was at times used as a means of escape (or attempted escape) whenever the police raided the SP Bookmaker (Frank Coughlin) who operated his business at the rear of the premises. The front man for the operation was Herb Hitchcock, who lived just across the road from Frank Coughlin in Macquarie Street, Boolaroo.

Though we were just young children we always knew when the SP bookmakers were going to be raided and we would sit on our side-fence to wait for the proceedings to start which when the raid did occur was always on a Saturday afternoon about 2.00pm. From our position on the pence we had a clear view of the raid and were not reluctant to give a bit of a cheer and rather enjoyed watching the men who were gathered about, attempting to get away.

There were two Barber Shops in Boolaroo, both being located on the Main Road. Bill Bradley occupied one small building almost opposite the Fire Station. Bill was a big chap, and was a product of the Newcastle Police Boys Club where he was taught to be a wrestler. He used to appear about the district usually as a support to boxing programs. He was colourful enough to make a few extra pounds at his sideline. He was also an active member of the Boolaroo Rugby Union Club and at one time he coached the Reserve Grade side. The other Barber was George Rinker who had his business in one of the buildings next to the Ambulance Station. George was a motor bike enthusiast.

The Mud-Flats

Between Speers Point Park and Teralba a link was formed by what was known locally as the “Five Islands”. This consisted of a large bridge over the creek and some other smaller bridges. The real important part for us though were the mud-flats and mangrove swamps, which were all part of lake and creek area. We had the time of our lives running and sliding on the wet mud. A lot of the local kids would head for the mud flats for a bit of fun, and I know one little girl from Teralba (Delma Lydiard) who had many a good time on the flats, sliding about on the wet mud with her elder brothers and sisters.

Later in life that same little Delma and I were married. She had the most beautiful dark brown eyes and a smile that must have been the envy of the angels. She was then, is now, and always will be:- **“My Own Little Gift From God.”**

We spent hours doing this and I can recall our cousins from Maitland, the Crowe’s and Edmond’s playing there and sliding all over the place. We would be covered in mud, but loved it, even though it did smell a bit. The good thing about it though was that it only took a short run to the lake, take a quick dip and we were fairly clean again. But I don’t think our swimmers were ever completely rid of the smell of the mud. Still, I’m sure we didn’t worry too much about aspect of things.

Taylor’s Boat Hire

A chap named Taylor’s ran a boat hire business and a small shop which was located just beyond Albert Street on the Esplanade. Others would hire his boats (all rowing boats) and take them out on the lake to do a spot of fishing. But we hired them with only one purpose in mind and that was to row them along where were about in front of our house on the Esplanade. Often we were given a lecture from Mr Taylor that we were not to use the boat to dive from. But of course that is exactly what we did, and had a great time. There were always other kids with us, the Haggerstons, Crameri, Robinsons and Sherrings who all joined in.

Later Mr Taylor sold out to a Mr Brown, from whom more than once we got the same lecture about the diving. The Brown’s had two daughters, one who was much older than me and Elaine who was about my age. The elder daughter married a chap and moved into a house just a few doors along from the shop, however I don’t recall his name. Mr Brown eventually sold out to a chap named Hipwell.

Boxing Day on the Lake

Boxing Day was a special day for the yachting fraternity on the lake and was the occasion for the large sailing boats to take part in an annual race. At full mast they were a wonderful sight, making the surge in the water to complete a spectacular turn about 200 metres from shore. From our front verandah, being on the extreme northern end of the lake, we got the best view possible, and they sometimes looked, if they had not turned, then they would come straight down the hall-way of our house.

Picture Theatres at Speers Point & Boolaroo

When were growing up there two picture theatres in the district. The Astor at Speers Point and The Royal at Boolaroo. The identity of the Astor was well known and plain to see for was a large “Astor” sign adorned the overhanging awning and I can remember that a little later the theatre underwent renovations and a fire escape was constructed on the northern side, which extended to the top floor. I doubt if any of the locals knew the name of Boolaroo theatre. It was just the picture show at Boolaroo for us and I cannot recall ever seeing a sign identifying it as “The Royal,”but that is what it was.

Both theatres were owned by Boolaroo Pictures Pty Ltd. Partners in the enterprise were T. Burgin, George Durie and T.C. Frith. At one time the trams had run through Boolaroo down to Speers Point terminating near the hotel. As youngsters we would often play under the back end of the Astor and one of the things we discovered was that some of the original tramline rails were stacked under there, and probably remain there to this day.

Mr Hoole, Registrar of Births, Deaths & Marriages

Mr Hoole lived 4 doors along from us on the Esplanade and at some time in his career had been the Health Officer for the Lake Macquarie Shire Council. In retirement he had become the Registrar of Birth, Deaths and Marriages. One of the local lads Ray Craft (8-10 years older than me) was married by Mr Hoole and I can recall only another one or two other marriages taken place there.

Mr Hoole was often called on to assist when any of the dogs belonging to the locals had been bitten by a tick or been poisoned. But for all his supposed expertise I cannot remember him ever curing any of his patients. Mr Hoole had several (5-6) Cocker Spaniel dogs and had them trained faithfully. A familiar sight was him taking the dogs for a swim.

He would take them to the shore of the lake and let them swim straight out some distance, probably about 30 yards or so, then he would give them a whistle and they would turn at right angles and swim parallel to the shore. Once again he would let them swim some distance and another whistle from him would bring them into the shore.

Doctors and Dentists

The first doctor I can remember at Speers Point was Doctor Morrison, who had his surgery on the north-east corner of Main Road and Nord Street. It was quite an impressive brick building for the times. He was there for several years and was well regarded.

Later came Doctor Fraser to the same premises and then Doctor Saunders, who died of a heart attack. Dr Smart came to Speers Point and set up a practice adjacent to the Chemist Shop on the Main Road. At Boolaroo', in the time I can recall, there was a Doctor opposite T.C. Friths on the Main Road. I must have been only 7-8 when my Mum took me to see him for something, the treatment of which entailed me receiving a needle which looked like the size of a 3 inch nail. In those days the Doctors seemed to have only one size needle, a big one. A year or two later on there was another Doctor who had a room upstairs in the Albert Hawkins building. Who he was I don't know.

Doctor Gluckstern and I think perhaps one or two other Doctors had premises on the Main Road opposite The Store. Doctor Gluckstern married Shirley, the daughter of T.C. Frith and they lived in Council Street for some time.

Mr Joyce was the best known Dentist and for many years he was the only one in the town. Again his surgery was on the Main Road, on the eastern side, down near Eighth Street. There was also a Mr Krause in rooms in the Hawkins building, and he had a reputation as a bit of a butcher.

The only Chemist in the area was Mr Scanlon, Main Road, Boolaroo, opposite The Store. He lived on the corner of First Street and Lake View Street, Boolaroo in a modern brick home. As he was the only Chemist for the whole area, including Speers Point, Boolaroo and Warners Bay, he virtually had a monopoly on that line of business. It was not until the early 1950s that a Mr Israel, became the local Chemist in premises on the western side of Main Road, Speers Point. Previously the premises had been a fruit shop run for a short while by a Mr Hume.

Bus Stops

Bus stops between Boolaroo & Speers Point. First at Boolaroo opposite Friths, then on southern side of Fourth Street, then in Central Hall, then near Joyce's the dentist, then halfway up the hill, then at the Council, another at Nord Street in front of the doctor's surgery, then the last one in front of the Billiard Room, which was opposite the Hotel. There were corresponding Bus Stops on the opposite side of the Main Road.

"Old Bill" Holland

"Old Bill" Holland, was employed by the Lake Macquarie Shire Council for many years as a street sweeper, keeping the gutters free of rubbish. I have no idea how old he was, but he was about the town doing his job when I started school and was still about there in the mid-1950s. He was part of the local scenery at the Point, and I don't think many people knew his surname. He was always known and referred to as "Old Bill" with a great deal of affection. He was very well liked.

I always harboured a suspicion that "Old Bill" had been well educated but he never really spoke about his early life. He was a veteran of WW1 and could speak French fluently. He was a regular at the local Billiard Room and would sit there by the fire listening to the men talk about topics of the day and not having much input. When it

suited him he would have a say and explain where they were right or wrong, his tone and manner leaving little room for argument. Then he would be quiet again.

As he was a man well advanced in years, his eyesight was not always the best, and I don't know the reason why, but sometimes it was better than others. One of his eyes had been damaged in the war, with the result being that his form on the billiard table was not consistent. However when he did show a bit of form he was capable of beating anyone in the room. He must have a player of some quality in his early days. "Old Bill" lived in a caravan in Speers Point Park, at the rear of the Kiosk and it was in that caravan that he was found one morning having passed away gently throughout the night. R.I.P "Old Bill."

Stan Heaney

A regular event at the picnics in the Park was the arrival of the speedboat "Kittyhawk," a beautifully crafted and furnished boat that looked spectacular in the water, with its gleaming chrome and superb varnished finished. It could be first seen coming from the direction of Warners Bay, making its way to the small jetty adjacent to the Rotunda in the Park. That in itself caused some excitement.

On arrival it did a steady business taking 5-6 people at a time for a ride at some speed on the lake. Of course the driver made it look more exciting and thrilling by creating waves and weaving the boat with some expertise. I don't think I ever heard the owner/driver's name mentioned in all the years I saw the boat in action.

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The owner/driver was Stan Heaney, a businessman of some variety and expertise who lived on the Esplanade just round past Morse Street, heading for Warner's Bay. He was well-known to the sporting folk in Newcastle, being the referee at Newcastle Stadium for quite some time during its glory days. In addition to that he described the boxing on the radio for many years. Eventually he and the popular Harry Mack, who refereed thousands of fights at Newcastle, became partners, buying out the ownership of Newcastle Stadium from Hughie Dwyer.

Always with an eye open for a business opportunity, at the end of WW2, the American army had no further use for the trucks etc used for military purposes in New Guinea, and they were left to rot or be sold at a token payment. Stan Heaney bought up much of the equipment and made a real financial "killing" on the project. A very popular and liked personality Stan Heaney died when the plane he was flying crashed near Sandy Hollow on Australia Day, 26th January 1952.

Smith's Shop

This mixed business was owned by Mr & Mrs Dick Smith and was located on the south/east corner of Albert and Speers Street, Speers Point. They had a son named Dick, who when Mr & Mrs Smith divorced, took over the running of the business for several years. After divorce, the former Mrs Smith remarried, becoming Mrs Waugh.

One of our neighbours Shirley Sherring worked there for several years. Shirley was about 6-7 years older than me. It was a terrific mixed business and they sold just about everything. There were always a few women in there who would gather to get the news of the day and spread a few rumours. Mrs Fitzpatrick who lived in Albert Street

was always there, as was Mrs Steel. If they had been there more often Mrs Smith would have had to charge them rent.

Down a few doors in Albert Street lived Mrs Flowers. She was a heavily built lady, and was often very drunk. I was too young to know how or where she got her drink. Anyway, I don't know what the cause was, but her house caught fire and burnt to the ground. Of course us kids all rather enjoyed the fire, being too young to realise just how horrible and dramatic were the events for Mrs Flowers.

Mr & Mrs Bob Shaw, who later moved to the Main Road, at that time lived next door to Mrs Flowers with their children Charlie, John and Mattie.

The Day the King died.

King George 6th, died Wednesday 6th February 1952 at Sandringham, a few months after undergoing surgery for lung cancer. He had been officially proclaimed King on 12th December 1936, following the abdication of his brother Edward VIII. Together with the patrons of the Astor Picture Theatre, I first learned of the good King's death when a notice came across the screen during the film being shown.

There was an audible gasp from the audience, a few moments hesitation, than many in the theatre left out of respect of the now late King. I think his death had been expected for some time as he had not been well. King George VI was highly regarded and it was a time of real sadness and loss for Australia, for he had reigned through the perilous years of World War 2 with great dignity and courage.

Many could remember him ordering a Day of Prayer throughout the British Empire on Sunday 29th March 1942, and once again on Thursday 3rd September of the same year, so dire and dreadful was the War situation. Older folk would have also remembered an earlier call for a National Day of Prayer by the Prime Minister of Australia Mr John Curtin on Sunday 16th November 1941.

Ray Atkinson

A Boolaroo local boy, Ray Atkinson, at one time worked at The Store and played cricket for The Store in the City and Suburban competition which was played on a Saturday afternoon. Inevitably he always won the best and fairest for that team in both the batting and bowling averages. He was a very good all round sportsman.

His main love though was Soccer, a game at which he excelled, playing at the top level with Lake Macquarie and Awaba. I recall Ray and I were both working for a company called Arcos at Wangi Wangi Power Station (then under construction) when he received a telegram to be in Sydney the next day to represent Australia against China. This was 1956-1957. Anyway Ray played for Australia and when he came back to work the next day, I asked him how proud he must have been representing his country. He told me that after the game that the players were not back in the dressing rooms more than a few minutes when the officials came around to collect the Australian shirts and socks. The players were not given anything or allowed to keep anything that showed that they had played for Australia. The players even supplied their own shorts.

When Ray was playing for Awaba he was paid £5 (\$10) a game which was good money in those days, and he was very pleased about that. Ray had a few games with Toronto Rugby League before they were in the Newcastle competition, and was an excellent player, kicking goals from all over the field. The thing I most admired about Ray was that he was always a great sportsman, a humble winner and a generous loser.

Gordon Goffett

Gordon Goffett, Council Street, Speers Point, was just another young boy about the town when I was growing up and I think I was a few years older. Of him, people would say he was always a gentleman. As a teenager Gordon played cricket with Westlakes Cricket Club, whose home ground was the Soccer Ground at Speers Point. His form was good enough for him to be picked up by Western Suburbs (Sydney) Cricket Club, for whom he would open the batting with the Australian Captain Bobby Simpson. He would travel to Sydney early on the Saturday morning to be on time for the games there.

Sometimes when I would go for an early morning run, I would meet him at the cricket nets at Walter's Park and bowl to him for a while. He never had any problem with my bowling. I cannot remember the years but he became the Captain of the NSW Cricket team and we used to watch him on TV in the Sheffield Shield. In his day job, Gordon worked for a Law firm in Newcastle.

Christine O'Neill & Craig Johnson

Christine O'Neill went to the Convent School at Boolaroo and was the daughter of Jack and Merle O'Neill. Jack was a painter and had his own business and at one stage was doing some contracting work for the NSW Electricity Commission at Wangi Wangi Power Station. Mrs O'Neill was the former Merle Mitchell who had also gone to the same school earlier in her own schooldays. She was some years older than me but I can remember her about the schoolyard.

Her parents bought Christine a tennis court at Teralba when she was in her teens, the effort paying off for her when she won the Women's Australian Open in 1978. The O'Neill family lived in Lake View street, on the opposite side and north a few hundred yards from Craig Johnson, who first played soccer for Lake Macquarie Club and then travelled to England as a teenager to become a world renowned player with the famous Liverpool Club.

T. C. Frith & Company

T. C. Frith (Thomas Charles Frith) had two shops, one on the south/west corner of Main Road and First Street, Boolaroo, the other on the corner of York Street and Anzac Parade, Teralba. They sold just about everything from shoes, clothing, manchester and hardware. Mr Frith lived on the south-east corner of Council Street, Speers Point in a lovely brick home. Mr Neville Lance, who I think was the manager at Boolaroo, lived almost opposite in a cream plastered house. Both had good lake views.

While Mr T.C. Frith had a lovely home, in a great location as far as getting a good view of the lake, on the downside was his home's position in relation to the Shire Council. It was immediately opposite as previously stated, and it was there that the

Council trucks, earth moving machinery and men all gathered first thing of a morning before setting off to very points of the Shire. It was all very noisy.

One of the oddities I can remember seeing was the old draught horse (Ben) coupled up to dray which would be full of goods to take to the store at Teralba. However there was no driver to guide the horse to his destination, for when all the goods were packed Ben was given a smack on the rump and off he would go to Teralba, a journey of about a mile and a half, by himself. Then after arrival at Teralba he would return along what we called the “Teralba straight” to Boolaroo. In my minds-eye I can still see him, getting along and sometimes breaking into a slow trot.

Mr Frith also had stores at Toronto and Warners Bay, but I can only remember the two mentioned.

Tommy Galbraith the Artist

Artist Tommy Galbraith lived with his parents at Warners Bay, and practised his art on anything there that was available. This included the side of their house or the toilet in the backyard. Of course one of the benefits for those going by was the scene often changed. He was great mate of my brother Gus, and they used to hang about together with other local lads of their age, going to the football and dances. I don't think Tommy ever played football but he would often go and watch the locals having a run.

Tommy eventually went to England to gain experience where he became well-known. Many years later Tommy and I had a mutual friend, a forensic orthodontist Ian McNeil. Ian studied and worked in London for some time and that is where he met Tommy, and was surprised that Tommy whose name cropped up in conversation one day, was known to us. Whenever Tommy returned to Australia he would go out to Edgeworth and catch up with my brother Gus and on one occasion gave him a most valuable book which included copies of many of his beautiful paintings. It was said to be valued at over \$300.

Bill Davies Garage

Bill Davies Garage, stood on the corner of Main Road and Second Street, Boolaroo and had a large staff, for that type of local business. Probably about 10 people. Mal Lawson, who married a local girl Marie Fenwick, was the foreman mechanic and a hard man. Once I went to him to get a “pink slip” for the car registration but he would not pass it as he said the hand-brake was not up to scratch. I then went to Radford's Garage at the Glendale and they passed it without any trouble. Mal and Marie had both gone to the Convent School at the same time, and after marriage lived at the top of Barford Street, Speers Point.

Later on Bill Davies sold out to the Virtue brothers, Brian and Gavin, before they in their turn sold it to HCB Electric.

Another chap who ran a car repair business was “Old Fred” Brooks. I don't know how old he really was but even the elderly men about the town referred to him as “Old Fred.” Whenever I would go by his workshop there was always 2-3 men sitting about having a talk and I always thought it was more of a place to have a talk, than an actual

place where work got done. Fred's place was in First Street, Boolaroo, south of the Main Road.

Shinfield's Pub

Located on the corner of Lakeview and Second Street, Boolaroo, the place was always only known as "Shinnies." To me it was always the home of Tommy and Molly Shinfield who both went to the Convent School, in Seventh Street, Boolaroo, and both were in the same class as myself. Although I did not know this in my younger days, their grandparents were the Doughan's who had the Pub first, before passing it on to their daughter and son in law. (Shinfield)

Tommy was a bit of a larrikin at school and on a few occasions Peter Haggerston and myself were sent down to the Pub to give Mrs Shinfield a sealed note from the Sister. We would have liked to have known what was written on the note, but were never game to look. Still, I'm sure it wasn't good news for Tommy.

The Doughan's built a Hall in Second Street at the rear of the Pub and was over the years used for a variety of purposes. In October 1916, just a few days before he left Australia to go to the USA, Les Darcy, together with Fritz Maki, appeared in a boxing exhibition at a function to raise money to assist in the building of a Catholic Church in Seventh Street. The Hall was also known as the Sulphide Hall.

Later on (and I can remember this) it was known as The Buffalo's Hall and was a very popular place on a Sunday morning when many of the locals gathered around a keg or two. Hotels were not opened for business in those days on a Sunday. Later it became the premises of Westlakes Printing.

Jack Sidebottom, Coal-carter

He was called "Young Jack" when were very young and we would often hitch a ride on the back of his coal-cart, which was being pulled by a draught-horse. He lived on the Main Road, Speers Point next door to where the Shaw family had their home. He was named after his father. We must have got awful dirty from the coal-dust but nobody seemed to mind too much. Perhaps our mothers did. Jack was a familiar and popular sight about the town and he used to always say "hello" to us kids.

I can remember getting a ride with him the day before he married "Ronnie" Fenwick. She was part of a well-known family in Boolaroo, having sisters Gertie and Marie. Gertie had a beautiful singing voice and I always thought her singing at Christmas Midnight Mass was well worth the wait. "Christmas, was not Christmas, if Gertie Fenwick wasn't singing."

In Boolaroo there was the Mason family who also had a coal-carting business and well into the 1950s did so with the use of draught horses. They would go to Stockton Borehole pit to get their coal and then make the slow trip to the next customer. How many trips a day they did I can only ponder but it could not have been too many.

Bread

During the War years and again in the late 1940s and early 1950s bread was not available on a regular basis. When it was available it was delivered to us by Merriions, bakers from Cardiff. Other bread-carters in the area were Fords, I think from Wallsend and the Cooperative Store, Boolaroo.

Often we would ring the Store Bakery to find out when they would be baking, and after being told the time, we would go and wait outside the Bakery to get whatever we could, because there was a limit on the number of loaves we could buy.

Crouchers Bakery on The Esplanade at Warners Bay was also a place where we went to get bread. At times my younger sister Maureen and myself would walk to the Bay in the morning, only to be told on arrival that they would not be baking until 1.00pm that day. The distance from Speers Point to Warners Bay was at least a mile and a half, so it was a fair walk for little kids. We would than retrace our steps to home and repeat the exercise in the afternoon. You had to be on time for a line up soon developed and again the supply was limited. So on a bad day going back and forth we had about a 6 mile walk and possibly a bit more.

The chap who drove the delivery van for Fords always spent a lot of time in the Hotel at Speers Point, and was always drunk. Once just after leaving the Hotel which was than under Licensee Jack Vaughan he ran into one of the local young boys Barry Dennett, injuring him so badly that his right arm became withered and was always much smaller than the other. Of course being young boys he didn't get all that much sympathy from us and we nicknamed him "the one-armed bandit." We also often called him by his father's nickname which was "Bumper."

Big Jetty at Speers Point

This was the main jetty at the point and was about 100 yards long, and fairly deep at the outer end. About halfway along the jetty on the western side was a small landing where small craft often tied up. A lot of people from Newcastle and those from picnics in the park would come there of a weekend to try their luck, and now and again they had caught a few fish.

For many years the jetty was lit up of a night with electricity being carried by several posts that ran along the eastern side all the way out to the end. Of course the overhead wires were a constant hazard to those fishing off the jetty and there were plenty of fishing lines caught in the overhead electric wires which were eventually removed. I think that was a matter of necessity for the posts carrying the wires had become old and dangerous.

Boxing Tournaments at Boolaroo

In the late 1940s Father Gallagher who was then the Parish Priest of the Lake MacQuarie Parish, with headquarters in Seventh Street, Boolaroo, approached my father George Clarke and asked if he could assist in any way to help get the Parish out of debt. I think there was still £600 (\$1200) owing on the church building at Boolaroo. Between them they came up with the idea of running a boxing tournament ,present Catholic Church which was a very popular sport at the time. In those days for night

entertainment at Boolaroo, there were the pictures or boxing, with dances every so often, but never on a regular basis.

Various tournaments were held over a few years and proved very successful with all-time -great Dave Sands often been on the program with his brothers Clem, Alfie and Russell. Among several pretty handy local lads was the popular “Mooksa” Jones, a member of the Jones family of Rugby Union renown. Trevor King of Cessnock also tried his hand there under the guidance of his trainer Taff Jones. Other famous trainers who assisted included Tom Maguire, Bluey Jones and “Pop” Lovett of Maitland.

Like many other social events, dances and balls, the tournaments were held in the Central Hall, which changed its name to Macquarie Grove. The hiring of the Hall was under the control of a Mr “Gundy” Roberts who lived about two doors down south of the present Catholic Church on the Main Road. “Gundy” was the brother of Jerry Roberts, who was connected with the swimming club at Speers Point.

Council Pound-Keepers

The men I remember who had those jobs were Charlie Feighan and Wock Griffiths of Warners Bay. They commenced their daily rounds from the Council Chambers in Council Street, and the straying stock they took into custody were impounded there awaiting a fee to be paid before being released to the owner. I think the fee was worked out on a daily basis and depended on how long the animal had been impounded. My brother Gus went through a stage where he and his mates had horses, none of which were much good for anything. The class of horse he had can be gauged by the fact that he bought one from Mrs Berthold for 5 shillings (50 cents), it only having one good eye.

Another time he bought one that was so savage we could not go out in our own back yard before it would charge at us. I think ownership of that particular horse only lasted a few hours.

Charlie and Wock, I thought had the best job in the world, and would ride down the Main Road on their horses on their way to the first job of the day, not knowing where or what they may encounter. I didn’t give any thought to the fact that their job had to be done in the blazing sun of the day or rain and wind. I only saw the attractive part and that was riding a horse.

Wock was a very good first-grade cricketer with West Lakes United Club at Speers Point. Charlie was from the well known Feighan family. He had attended the convent school at Boolaroo, with sisters Barbara and Betty. His cousins Pat and Theresa also went there, and it was his grandmother who owned Feighan’s Wine Bar at the Bay. She was always called “Granny Feighan.” An uncle of Charlie was Les Feighan who at one time was Flyweight Champion of Australia. (Boxing)

Unloading Racing Pigeons at Cockle Creek

This was a weekly event with the pigeons been brought from Sydney or other areas to be released to return to their owners. The release point was just off the rail track on the eastern side of the Main Road, just about 100 yards from Cockle Creek Station, the same spot where the circus animals would be unloaded.

The local boys who had a few birds of their own, would keep a keen eye out and were up to all sorts of chicanery themselves and would watch to see when the visiting pigeons were released for the flight home, wherever that may have been.

Once the locals could see the pigeons in the distance they would release their own birds who would then fly up among the others, and soon would bring one or two of them home with them, thus building up the local lads own pigeon numbers. Once in capture the rings on the birds-legs were removed. This occurred on a weekly basis.

Dances at Boolaroo

During the late 1940s and early 1950s dances were held on a Monday night at the Central Hall (Macquarie Grove) and were organised by a chap by the name of Sel Stewart. He was not a local but where he came from is anyone's guess. For quite some time he boarded at Reynold's Boarding House at Speers Point.

Boolaroo Rugby Union Club

The first ground I can remember where the team played was on the ground adjacent to Eighth Street, Boolaroo. The ground was nearly all gravel and must have been hard and painful to play on. Some of the officials were Dave Marchant, Tom Hodges with Ernie Boyle being almost a fixture among the players. My two eldest brothers Gus and Paul played with the Club for only a season, before playing with Lake Macquarie Rugby League team which had been formed.

I think it was 1948 that the Club entered a team in the Carlton Club competition and had a very successful year, winning the Grand Final and the Carlton Cup. Jimmy Hipwell was the half-back and captain of the side which included his mate Kevin McBlane. Jimmy married my eldest sister Veronica.

Eventually the Club shifted headquarters to a ground just north of the Ambulance Station on what we then called the "Cockle Creek" straight. The Jones family were prominent identities of the Club, with the then venerable "Batcher" Jones and sons Don and Ray all being very well respected in the Rugby Union community. There no dressing sheds on the ground and the players used a shed in First Street, opposite Friths for that purpose.

Rugby League at Speers Point

I think it must have been in 1946 that a team was formed at Speers Point and entered two teams in the "A" and "B" grade, first in a competition that included Wyong and Morisset before entering the Western Suburbs competition. Western Suburbs was the major district club for the area and Speers Point fell under them. My father was Secretary for a long time, and a Mr Brown of Warners Bay was the President. The Lake teams played on a piece of very rough ground, almost completely surrounded by swamp, named after the local publican Jack Vaughan. The ground became known as Vaughan Park.

While my father was in the position as secretary he had many talks with Mr Albert Paul (senior and junior) who used to drive over to see him from Belmont. Another chap that came with them sometimes was Bert Sharp. The result of those meeting was

that Lakes United team was formed with headquarters at Belmont and played on a ground which was later known as Cahill Oval. The team commenced in 1947, going through that season undefeated and taking out the Newcastle competition.

Needs' Butcher Shops

The shop on the corner Fifth Street and Main Road, Boolaroo seems to have been there forever and many directions have given starting at that landmark. Lance Needs has operated from that corner longer than I can remember, but I do recall the days when Jack Kenny and Bob Frost both worked there, together with the daughters of Mr Needs. It was always a very busy shop, and so busy in fact that at one time they also operated another shop down along the Main Road, opposite the Public School.

Some butchers who worked there over the years included Jack Kenny who was a councillor on the Lake Macquarie Shire Council and for a period was the Shire President. Bob Frost was another, and the brother of Mrs Sherring who lived just two doors from us on the Esplanade. Peter Needs who was about my age become part of the staff when he commenced work.

Though he knew us well Bob Frost never did us any favours with the price of meat he served to us, and I always considered it something akin to a feat of magic just how he could tell the price owed when he would throw the meat onto the scales from about a yard away and while the scales were still rolling about, he could tell the exact amount we had to pay. Talk about Ned Kelly being a gentleman? Mrs Kelly would not have let "little Ned" play with any of those butchers in the area.

At Speers Point on the western side of the Main Road, opposite Bissett's Paper Shop, a Mr Wilson of Belmont commenced a Butcher Shop. As it was the only such shop in the town it did a good business, but was very dear. There was only ever one person working there at a time, and Wilson's Meats seemed to have had a fair few butchers, nobody seemed to stop very long.

Tommy "Mo" Stones fish Shop, Boolaroo.

This was the only fish and chip shop in either Boolaroo or Speers Point. It was located on the eastern side of the Main Road, between Fourth and Fifth Street. "Mo" lived in a little house at Cockle Creek on the opposite side on the Main Road to the Station. "Mo" was not the Tommy Stone who lived at Speers Point and was a good mate of my brother "Gus."

He had a thriving business in Boolaroo, especially of a Friday when it seemed everybody in the town bought fish and chips for their tea. He was a fairly big chap whose wife served in the shop. It was only a small, narrow shop and even as kids it didn't fit too many customers.

Bill Sweeney, fisherman

Bill Sweeney was a professional fisherman who lived a few doors along from Thompson Road, Speers Point heading towards Warners Bay. Bill was a familiar sight walking along the Esplanade either to or coming from the Hotel at Speers Point. He always had his trousers rolled up about to the calf of his leg. He had a son, also a fisherman, who was known as "Young Bill", and was identical to his father in many

ways. They had the same strut when walking and he too rolled his trousers up the same way as his father. Both of them were always bare-footed.

Tommy Kelly

I always knew him as “Mr Kelly,” though I did know that earlier in his life he had been a very good, tough boxer. He was always a very nice man, who lived in a little house on the eastern side of the Main Road, Speers Point, just down from Nord Street. There he lived with Mrs Kelly and their three sons, Eddie, Roy and Craig, who became a very good soccer player with Lake Macquarie.

Tommy Kelly, originally came from the Corrimal district of Wollongong and was a successful boxer there from 1919, before he thought he would expand his ambitions and try his luck in Newcastle where he had many bouts. My wife and I shifted our own home to Corrimal in 1967 and one of the first people I met there was Tommy Kelly. He was visiting relatives there who turned out to live about 100 yards from us.

When Tommy came to Newcastle he worked in the Stockton Borehole Colliery at Cockle Creek. I remember that he always wore boots that were so shined you could almost see your reflection in them. In later years Tommy and Mrs Kelly moved to a house on the southern side of Eighth Street, Speers Point.

Police Station

The original Police Station I can recall was a weatherboard house on the western side of the Main Road, Boolaroo, just south of Fourth Street. It had a lockup in the backyard where the Police put the larrikins overnight until they could attend court. The first Policeman I can recall was Constable (then later on Sergeant) Lace Bradbury. There was a bus stop immediately in front of the Station and often Bradbury would be standing out there dressed only in trousers and a singlet. He was a very big, strong man, and for many years was the Police authority in the district.

He was not well-regarded among the townsfolk and there were few that felt any sorrow at his eventual retirement, after which he purchased a small farm in Hopkins Street, Speers Point from the Harragon family. A Policeman's lot is not always a happy one. Paul Harragonr, the ex-captain of the Newcastle Knights in the NRL competition is a descendant.

A new Police Station was built on the corner of the Main Road and Seventh Street, Boolaroo, opposite the Church of England, where it still remains.

Construction work at the Sulphide Corporation 1953.

Major expansion works of the Sulphide Corporation at Cockle Creek commenced in 1953, by a Sydney building contractor J. R. Pillars. They were an excellent company to work for and employed many of the men from the district. Their particular project lasted about 3-4 years and they paid good wages for the time. Mr Paige Pillars was the engineer in charge and he was a very well respected man who was always polite to the workmen. He was a real gentleman.

A lot of the work was either very hot or very cold, and work was carried on in all sorts of weather, rain not halting the work process. Men just worked in the rain and heat and accepted it as normal. That was just the ways things were done in those days. The City of Maitland was flooded during those years of construction and J. R. Pillars sent many men and trucks there to help with the clean up and to assist any way they could. The company had no links to Maitland but they did it because it was the right thing to do. Today it would be said of them that they were a “good corporate citizen.”

It was on that job that Builders Labourers first got Sick Pay entitlements. But they didn't get it for nothing, because they had to forfeit 5/- (5 shillings or 50 cents) of their weekly pay in exchange for the sick leave entitlement, which was for 5 days a year. An interesting thing regarding wages in those times and for some years to come was that wages had to be paid in cash, no cheques or bank deposits.

Just prior to that project commencing at the Sulphide there was a tragic death when a rigger, Len Putty, an employee of the Sulphide, fell to his death. Len was married to Beryl Ryan, a daughter of a well-known family at Speers Point, at the time. Mr Ryan, Beryl's father, worked at the Sulphide at that time as a blacksmith.

In those days and for some years to come when the situation demanded it employees were paid 6 pence an hour extra if they were called on to work in places which were regarded as being far in excess of normal working conditions. Dirt money, height money, confined space, danger money and heat money all came under that category, but an employee could only claim one category at a time.

If you were paid dirt money for example, that ruled you out for a claim on any of the other categories. At times you were virtually risking your life, all for 6 pence an hour extra. In those days there were no such things as safety belts, harnesses, safety helmets or safety glasses.

Female employees in those days, in all types of industry, if required to worked overtime (I think the time was up to 8.00pm) had to have transport provided for them to their home. Women's equality and many women's associations and spokespersons soon put paid to that requirement of the law and now have the present situation which regards them as any other employee. So well done ladies, you have travelled a long way, all backwards.

Terry Dear's Amateur Hour in 1949

Terry Dear conducted the Australian Amateur Hour on radio once a week for several years and it was a program that attracted a large audience of listeners. Amateur singers and musicians had to apply and were auditioned to gauge their respective talents. If selected they went on the show, the winner being the person who gained the most votes from the listeners. The winner was announced the week following their appearance on the program.

One of the winners was a very young girl from Speers Point who had arrived from Scotland only a year or so before her appearance on the show which I think was in 1948. She was Margaret Sutherland who lived with her parents and elder sister Annette, with the Shaw family on the Main Road. Mrs Sutherland was Mrs Shaw's

sister and a lovely lady, who had recently arrived Australia from Scotland. Mrs Sutherland's husband Jim was a carpenter and built a nice weatherboard home in Boolaroo.

Anyway the young girl won the votes of the public by a long way as she had a beautiful voice. The local shopkeepers all made up voting papers and which ever shop you went into locally, there was a voting form confronting you and to which you applied your name. I'am not sure how old she was but she was only small and still in primary school when she won the program against all comers on that occasion.

Hardy's Hill

From the hills we could see from the back verandah of our home we had a good view of what we called Hardy's Hill, but there wasn't all that much to see really, just some hills with a reservoir stuck on top. There was hardly a green patch or tree to be seen on the hills, the output from the Sulphide Corporation preventing any green growth, and how many people living in surrounding townships that died from lead and other toxics that spilt out from the Company can only be supposed. Certainly it must have been in the hundreds. The only thing I know of Mr Hardy with certainty was that he owned a number of homes at the top-end of Seventh Street on the northern side.

The Lake

The water in the lake could become very rough and dangerous rather quickly indeed and it was foolish to underestimate just how fast it would rise, the various winds across that vast expanse of water making things very choppy. Generally though the locals were aware and knew the conditions of the lake very well, but there were a few times, that we were called on to rescue some fellow that had fallen into the lake of the end of the jetty. Mostly it was their own fault and on the occasions that did it occur was always some chap that had come across to the Point in his motor boat from Warners Bay to fill himself up at the Pub.

There was never any problem for the road traffic though once in the early 1950s at the time of the Maitland floods, it rained so heavy and for so long, that the water in the lake rose to the level of the road on the Esplanade during the floods, and we could not get out of our front yard on the Esplanade, and had to go out through the paddock where Mr Bill Avis later built his home.

Royal Theatre, Teralba

The Theatre was located in Anzac Parade, Teralba, and proved to be a very popular venue of entertainment for the local community. Whereas the theatres in Boolaroo and Speers Point didn't advertise the films that would be shown on weekdays and Saturday night, the Royal was a frequent advertiser in the Newcastle Morning Herald. The final program at The Royal were the films:- "Bye, Bye, Birdie," and "They Found a Cave," on Saturday 1st February 1964.

Kangaroo at Speers Point.

I have no idea who owned the kangaroo or even if anyone did, but I suppose someone must have had a claim to it at some time for it was about the back-streets of Speers

Point for a few years when I was very young, probably only about 7-8 at the time I can remember it.

I think someone in Albert Street must have had it, for in those days there was a vacant paddock in that street, and the kangaroo was often there. Sometimes it would get out and we (a heap of local little kids) would chase it all over the place, never giving any mind to the danger we would have been in if the kangaroo had decided to come at us.

The Cooperatative Store

The Store in Boolaroo was a branch of the Cooperative Store in Newcastle and occupied land on the Main Road between Fourth and Third Streets, with further property, I think in Third Street, where the Bakery belonging to the Store was located. On Third Street corner was the BP petrol station that belonged to the Store, and customers buying petrol there got their “divvy” on whatever was spent. The Store also had a branch in York Street, Teralba

Churches

An interesting aspect of the district was that all the Churches of various religious denominations were nearly all located in Boolaroo, there being none in Speers Point, although Warners Bay had a Catholic Church later in the late 1950's. Teralba also had a Catholic Church in Railway Street, a Church of England in York Street and a Presbyterian Church, which was also in York Street. If there were any more in Teralba, then I cannot recall them.

Boolaroo was well represented with the Church of England, Main Road, the Catholic Church, Seventh Street, and later on the Main Road; the Methodist Church, Main Road, (now the Uniting Church in Australia) Main Road, the Presbyterian Church, Fourth Street and the Baptist Church in Sixth Street. I think there may have also been a Congregational Church in Fourth Street, but I'm unsure about that.

Pearson's Mixed Business

This was on the corner of Main Road and Second Street opposite the Public School. I think I was only in that shop once or twice and cannot remember much about it at all. Maxie Pearson and his sister Gloria went to the Convent School at Boolaroo. Maxie was much older than me but I think Gloria might have been a year ahead of me. Maxie will always be famous in my eyes for he was one of the two Telegram boys who rode through the town on 15th August 1945 letting everyone know that the War was over. Later on in years he often came to the Billiard Room at Speers Point where he proved to be an excellent player of both billiards and snooker.

The Pearson's eventually sold the business to the family which included a son Billy Gibson, who played both Rugby League and Rugby Union with the local teams.

Teddy McGrath, SP Bookmaker

Teddy McGrath was a popular figure who lived in a very nice residence in First Street, Boolaroo, just up from the Commercial Hotel. The locals, probably I think would have been at a loss if asked the directions to the “Commercial Hotel,” for although it did have a sign outside carrying that name, for as long as I can remember it was

always known as “Burton’s Hotel” being named after the family that had occupied the premises for a very long time.

When in my early twenties, being in the company of another local person of my age and a visitor from Sydney. We inquired where he was stopping, to which he replied, “The Commercial”. We looked at one another and said. “where’s that.” To that time I don’t think either of us had looked at the sign and although it was rather prominent, it had been totally disregarded by us

But back to Teddy McGrath. He was a familiar figure who every morning about 6.30am would walk down the Main Road through Boolaroo and Speers Point, turning at “Pippy’s” Hotel, taking the road towards the Park, back up Park Street, to take himself home.

Teddy also ran the “two-up” game on a piece of scrubland at Cockle Creek, with every person in the town knowing where it was held, with the exception of the police. Now and again the police would raid “the game” and then lay off for a while. At one time I had a part-time job driving a taxi for a chap called Norm Radford, and I would frequently get a call to either take someone to the game or to go there to pick up a person. All the police had to do was listen to the taxi-radio if they were interested in knowing when and where Teddy was having his little gathering.

Original Shire Council

The original Lake Macquarie Shire Council at Speers Point was located on the corner of Main Road and Council Street, and was a nicely structured brick building. After the new Council Chambers was built the old building served as the local Courthouse for several years.

A few of the councillors I remember are Jack Kenny (also the local butcher, who worked for Lance Needs), Arthur Groves and Jack Pendlebury. All three were at one time also President of Lake Macquarie Shire Council.

There was also a Court in Teralba with the Community Hall next door to the Royal Theatre, in Anzac Parade, being utilised for that purpose on a regular basis. At lunch time, the sitting Magistrate would walk the 100 yards or so to have meal at the Great Northern Hotel that was on the south-east corner of Anzac Parade and William Street. The actual postal address for the Hotel is 2 Anzac Parade, Teralba.

Railway Station, Teralba

The Railway Station at Teralba always had a nice garden with a nice change of flowers provided by the Station staff throughout the year. Often the Station won the Award for having the Best Garden and it was always the garden that other Stations set out to beat. Winning the Best Garden Award was a long held and proud tradition in Teralba, dating from about 1914 when the very civic-minded Mr Treay arrived as the new Station Master and with the help of his staff set about making the Station one of beauty of which the whole town could be proud.

Slang Terms of Currency

Treybit	threepence
Zac	sixpence
Deener	12 pen
ce or one shilling	
Two bob	Florin or two shillings
Dollar	Five shillings
Quid	one pound or 20 shillings
Quinea	twenty one shillings

The Rhondda Hotel

This was a popular little ditty among the young lads of the area when I was growing up.

On the Hill, on the Hill,
The Rhondda Hotel on the Hill.
They serve the best beer,
12 months of the year,
Out at the Rhondda Hotel.

Now they tell me,
That “Blossom” is leaving Teralba,
Bound for old Boolaroo,
Heavily laden with bills
That she owes,
And bound for the pub she adores.

Now the barmaids and butchers,
And such things to speak,
And the dirty old miners,
From around Cockle Creek.

So we’re saying goodbye,
To them all,
As back down the mine holes they crawl,
You’ll get no free beer,
This month of the year,
Out at the Rhondda Hotel.

“Blossom” was apparently a well-known lady of the area who frequented the local hotels of the day. I remain doubtful if it ever reached the “top ten” of the day.

Lake Macquarie Hotel, Teralba

Lake Macquarie Hotel was located at what the locals called the bottom end of Anzac Parade and fronted onto the Lake, there being no road in front of it in those days. Next door to the Hotel was a Hall, which in the days circa 1910-1920 was used for boxing promotions, and as it was on the land on which the Hotel was located, the Hall was called after the licensee of the day.

It was two-storied weatherboard building and by the time the mid 1950's came along its days as a Hotel were gone, the building being taken over by the McFarlane family as a boarding house. About the time that WW2 ended, the Hotel was being run by a Tommy Sinclair, who was a relative of the Sherring family who lived two doors from us on The Esplanade.

In the early days of the Hotel it was very well known throughout the State and sportsman of all types, but especially boxers would come there to stay, while using the local facilities, such as the Hall next door and the lake to train.

So now for the time being, I conclude here, and what I have written are but some of the memories I have of my young days at Speers Point and of times when people were courteous and the world made sense. Those years are now gone and form part of our history, but of them I have such lovely memories, but much more than memories, more like beautiful dreams gently remembered.

Michael J. Clarke, OAM. BA.