

## OLD HELENSBURGH

(Part transcript of an oral history of Mrs URSULA BOYD (nee MONRO) born in Helensburgh in 1912, conducted and transcribed by PAM THOMAS).

[continued from October Bulletin]

### **And Stanwell Park was nice in those days?**

Yes, Stanwell Park was lovely in those days. Years later a friend in Jannali did a painting of Stanwell Park. She showed it to me. I said "It's not Stanwell Park. There's something wrong with it. I don't know what it is but there's something wrong with it. I come home and thought about it. I went back and I said "I found out what's wrong with the painting. You've got houses in it. There weren't houses in Stanwell Park, the old Stanwell Park. You know.

### **So what was down there in those days?**

There was the surf shed and the old kiosk place and then you went over big sandhills which were about seventy feet high between the ocean beach and what they called the Green. Everybody used to go to this lovely green parkland and have picnics under the trees near the creek. I believe later on after the children were drowned in the lagoon they moved the sandhills and filled the lagoon part with the sand. I've got a photo of a church picnic taken down at Stanwell Park in 1914. Everybody used to go but they went by train.

### **Sunday School picnics were all held down there, were they?**

No, no. Sunday School picnics weren't. Sunday School Anniversary Days were a big day in the town. The Methodist Sunday School. We'd all have our new white dresses.. They'd go down the gullies and bring up the bangalow palms and put them all around the church. Dad used to invite members of the Male Voice Choir to come and sing with the kids.. The church would have standing room in it. It would be packed to the doors for the Sunday School performance. That was usually held on the Sunday before Eight Hour Day, and Eight Hour morning we'd all go up with our pannikins on a string round our neck and Mr Smith the carrier - my picnic day started when I saw Mr Smith and his dray and horses come round from Walker Street, to collect the things at the church, because the was on the side of the hill then, it wasn't where it is now. I used to think "We're ready now, here comes Mr Smith. And we'd march up to what was called 'Cambridge's paddock' up here where Mrs Ann Lawson lives now. Then later we would get on a bus. We'd go out to Blue Gum for the picnics.

### **Where was Blue Gum?**

At the corner of Princes Highway and Lawrence Hargrave Drive, but it was on the Princes Highway side of that intersection. Blue Gum Picnic Ground.

**And you had races there.**

Yes, things like that.

**What was the strongest church in the town in those days?**

Well, I suppose I'd have to say the Methodist Church in this regard that it was a more active church. We had a very good choir. Musically it was a very good church. They had their Sewing Guild. But then I think the Church of England and the Presbyterian (I never knew anything about the Catholic doings really) they all had their own but I wasn't associated with them in any way. We were only associated with the Methodist Church.

**Do you think being a mining town there was more in the Methodist and perhaps...**

That may have something to do with it. The Methodist Church was the first church in the 'Burgh. There were a lot of Scottish people in the Methodist Church. When the Presbyterian Church some of the families split. Some went to the Presbyterian and some still remained in the Methodist. So that we had like a Scottish congregation and we had a Welsh congregation and all that sort of thing.

**Do you think the Welsh influence helped with the band and the music and all that sort of thing? Musical background?**

It might have helped musically but I don't think . . . no, the band was a mixed group of people. There were Scotch there was Welsh there was English - there was everything in the band.

**What about sport? What did the miners do for their sport?**

Mainly football. They played football, and there was the cricket club and then there was several tennis clubs in the town, but soccer was the main thing.

**And did you play sport at all?**

Oh, yes, I played basketball at school. You'll never believe it, in black bloomers and a blue top down to my knees. (Laughter). And black stockings and sandshoes. But the school yard was very primitive and that basketball court was on dirt. Dirt and stones. There was no grass or anything like that.

**Did you get gravel rash?**

Oh, I suppose we did but it was part of the thing.

**Now tell me about school.**

And then the tennis court was made of asphalt and it went up a hill at the western end of it, so we used to stand and serve up on that end.. School - I started school the day before I was five. I had been a fortnight before and been sent home. In the kindergarten. The thing that impressed me most in the kindergarten stage was the photo of King George the Fifth on the wall. Because we were very patriotic. That was 1917 in the war years, and everybody . . . the schooling had a very patriotic air about it.

**Were they knitting for the soldiers and things like that in those days and . . .**

I suppose they were in the higher classes but I wasn't . . . I was only kindergarten in 1917.

**Flags and things.**

Flags and things, yes lovely flags. In 19... I think it was 1911 on the 9th September 1911 there was a Scottish flag, a beautiful Scottish flag sent out from Helensburgh in Scotland and we sent an Australian flag to Scotland. I used to love to see that lovely red, yellow and red flag up on the pole. I suppose it stirred my Scottish

blood - I don't know. But we were very patriotic orientated and Empire Day was THE day at school. We'd have practice and songs, all our different patriotic songs and we'd all be assembled. And all the dignitaries of the town would come down and listen to us and then we'd have a fete.

**Who were the dignitaries?**

Oh, perhaps the doctor, the ministers of all the churches and wonder of wonders one time even the Catholic priest came down to our school because I must say there was a very big religious difference within the town. Very much so. People sort of didn't.

**Was there a Catholic school in those days?**

Yes, there was a Catholic school.

**Was there antagonism between . . .**

Oh well, you know, Catholic, Catholic pull the bell, while the protestants go to hell. Catholic, Catholic, Catholic dogs you know, and all the rest of it, there was all that between us. But there was friendships among people but there . . . us kids used to rouse each other.

**Do you think that still happens?**

I have been told that there is a certain amount of it. I would have thought ecumenically it would have eased out a lot but I don't know . . . I've got such a funny family.. I've got Catholics and Congregationalists, Methodists and I've got a Goanese granddaughter and Italian in my family. I've got everything so that we had to come to the conclusion family-wise . . . see we'd both been brought up in that strict era of religion that everybody was going in the one direction and we had to accept the lot, so we never made any difference about it, you know.

**What did you do after school in the afternoons?**

In summertime we went down the creek or down the dam swimming or up in the bush and round about.

**Where did you learn to swim?**

In the dam. The dam was a big dam then, and it had a big pier that went out into it. There were three turncocks on the end of the pier. It was the water for the mine, and it went from the dam right down through the creek to the railway, to where the railway is, and then round through the two tunnels to the mine. There were these big four inch iron pipes, which we used to have fun walking on the pipes. On the pier, my father used to put a belt round our waist and a piece of cordline, put us in and he'd walk along the pier and we had to swim along the bottom. But, not being snobbish, we had water wings. Other kids didn't have water wings. But we'd think we were swimming and we'd think he held the rope but it would be all slack and we'd be swimming along. He taught quite a lot of people to swim in that manner down in the dam. Of course, lovely fresh water and everything in those days. Then one time they had a swimming race in the dam between 'Fishe' and Fred Johnston. Everybody went down to look at the race. I think Fred won, if I remeber correctly. We lived in the bush, roamed the bush all over. Between here and Garrawarra Hospital we knew every stick and stone and the caves.

**Was it safe?**

Of course it was safe.

**Your mother didn't tell you "Don't go wandering around"?**

Oh, no, no. We had none of that sort of fear at all. I used to think it was lovely every so often to think "oh, that flower ought to be out now in the bush. I'd better go and have a look at it. No, we had no fear and the bush was lovely and the creeks were lovely. We used to go, and swim in a little creek down in the bottom. There was a little dam down near the railway. We used to swim in that. I think it's been knocked down now

**What about in the town?****Was there ever any crime or anything that people worried about?**

No, there were a couple of bad boys in the town but there was never anything really bad that I can remember. I suppose there was petty thieving went on but I never heard anything of it. There were two policemen in the town.

**Was there respect for the policemen?**

I only know personally. One policeman that used to be here when I was little; me and my cousin were playing in the creek down near the band hall. He came along and said "And who might you be? You'd better go home. We just piped up "We're the Miss Monros". (Laughter) Years later, I loved this old policeman; he was a lovely old chap. He introduced me to my husband, many many years later.

**So you met your husband. And where did you go when you were courting?**

Well, I . . . when I came to high school age I travelled to high school to St. George at Kogarah. Well, I came home one night and I said to Dad "I think I'd like to work in an office." And he said to Mum "Better take her into the business college tomorrow." Therefore I started on at the business college and I worked in town. When I was about thirteen, for ten years I travelled daily on the train like many others of us did. Most of us that wanted to work had to work out of the town; some in factories, some in offices and that sort of thing.

**And you met your husband?**

When I was about sixteen I met him. He and Jerry (this was another policeman) had been up from Wollongong. They used to bring the bullion up, escort the bullion from Port Kembla.

**What was the bullion for?**

I don't know. It used . . . the silver and that used to be melted at Port Kembla . . . I don't think it must have been known very much. They used to bring the ingots up in the train. Travelling every day, we got to know the men. I've sat in a railway carriage with thousands of dollars of silver under my feet. They always used to have a police escort, as well as the . . . I don't know if they came from the banks or where they came from. A couple of other men that used to be with it. They used to escort prisoners from Wollongong to Sydney on the trains you see. They'd get out at Central Station and instead of going out the front barrier they'd go down through the luggage and parcels lift. Down and out through that way. People didn't know anything about it unless they did know.

**The prisoners, were they in handcuffs?**

I suppose so. Depending on what sort of prisoners they were. My husband worked in Corrimal police station, while Jerry was at Bellambi. They used to be detailed to Wollongong where they were under to do it - to do the job.

**About what time was this - 19?**

1930s. No, It would be 1928, wouldn't it? When I was sixteen. About 1928 when I first came into contact with it.