SHERBROOKE VILLAGE

Seen through the Mists of Time—over eighty years ago—Sherbrooke appears a wonderful place to have grown in and enjoyed. It was situated on Bulli Mountain, five miles from the mining township of Bulli. Grandpa had been a manager at one of the local mines (his people had originally owned a mine, the "Black Prince Colliery" in Durham, England): but Grandpa loved growing all sorts of green things, and as he became older selected a large tract of land on Bulli Mountain and introduced quite a number of foreign plants and trees into Australia for (if I remember rightly) Shepherds and Yates, who were seed merchants even in those far off days.

The residents of Sherbrooke were genuine pioneers. If a home was needed the men would go into the bush and fell a suitable tree or trees. Then such a work of sawing, chopping, adzing and planing would be done. All the work of loading and transporting would be done with drays and the aid of faithful bullocks. Frequently a road had to be made to the site of operations. In those days the neighbours who were disengaged would be there, bright and early to lend a helping hand. Later on Germans, Norwegians and other nationalities moved into the locality bringing with them new ideas concerning building and painting so gradually more modern homesteads appeared.

Grandpa and Dad cultivated acres of fruit trees and grapes. The ground was very fertile, Apples, Peaches and Plums grew in abundance. They also had more than a hundred hives of bees. Much of Grandpa's success with the foreign plants was attributed to the bees in pollinating the flowers.

We had no shops at Sherbrooke. A butcher with his horse and cart appeared periodically, but mostly the established people killed their own meat, and of course, when there was a surplus, shared it with their neighbours. Fuel stoves and open fires were used in every home. Kerosene lamps and candles were the only lighting we had (There is still a candle-mould amongst our family's treasures. Mamma always made our candles).

Our property was along the banks of the Cataract River and because of the abundant rainfall we were never short of water. There were no tanks, water for domestic use was collected in large wooden casks.

Sherbrooke was a very hilly place. The cabbage tree palms grew very tall there. Quite a number of the residents plaited the leaves of the palms and made very neat serviceable hats from the strands, which proved a useful shade during the hot summer days.

The road down Bulli Pass was very picturesque, but had to be negotiated carefully for some of the bends were difficult to manipulate; but we had no accidents, perhaps because there were no hotels about. The "Lookout" on the top of the Pass is really world renown-
ed, and truly breathtaking. An American friend recently showed me a photograph of the "Lookout" which I recognised immediately though there were several modern buildings round about.

In the early stages of occupancy the residents made the roads to their properties and kept them in repair. Eventually the Council sent along "maintenance men" with their horses and drays, and we children loved to watch the men as they broke up stones into small pieces to fill up holes in the road. They seemed to accomplish a lot of work and took a pride in it too. If the men worked near our home and it was drawing near lunch time, Mamma would send us to them with a big billycan of tea which was much appreciated.

Sherbrooke had amongst its many attractions a large expanse of vacant ground called "The Swamps." Its ground was mostly sandy and flat; quite unlike the fertile soil prevalent on the farms; but during the summer the Swamps were simply ablaze with colour and the perfume from the flowers had to be inhaled to be believed. The Musk had not lost its scent: acres of Jockey Club grew everywhere, and its scent was overpowering. Brilliant Waratahs flourished in profusion and lovely dogroses grew in every shady place. Whenever Dad had time, we children would go with him on a bright summer's day carrying our lunch and billycan and return home when the shadows lengthened, carrying arms full of sweet wild flowers for Mamma.

Wild animals did not often come near our home. One half-starved-looking dingo once paused at our front fence, but quickly disappeared when I shouted at him.

Wallabies prefer rocks to live amongst, and were very nervous of meeting our dogs.

Flying Foxes were a menace in the orchards. Their scent is most objectionable and if they just touch fruit the terrible odour lingers.

There were numerous wattle trees growing on part of our place and people would collect the bark for the leather tanners. Two young men who were nephews of Mr. Tyson (our first Australian millionaire, I believe) were camped near our front gate, and we were very thrilled because it was the first time we had seen a tent. We thought it a wonderful invention.

Soon, however, everything altered for us. The Government resumed our property, our orchards and all the other peaceful homes in Sherbrooke and began preparing to build the Cataract Dam. There were railway lines through our beautiful orchards; engines and trucks clattered all day; about eighty canvas tents were erected near our back fence. There was constant noise of blasting as the
men blew out the blue-metal in Dad's quarry to make the Reservoir. To a child's mind the workers seemed orderly and quiet people, but all our free happy times were ended.

After about twelve months of this unsettling experience the "Powers That Be" "recompensed" Dad with £1,000 and we moved out of Sherbrooke (or rather, what was left of dear Sherbrooke) for ever, and Dad bought a home for us near Camden. The property was called "Woodstock" and the village is called Cobbitty. Cobbitty is noted for its old historical church and rectory. But we have never forgotten Sherbrooke.

—Mrs. Lilly Drinkall,
15 Warwick Street, Woy Woy.
22 July, 1981.

(Mrs. Drinkall's reminiscences have been kindly made available to the Bulletin by Mrs. Gail Madaschi, a student at the Wollongong Institute of Education, who is engaged on research into the history of Sherbrooke. Cataract Dam was completed in 1907, so it will be seen how far back Mrs. Drinkall's memories reach).