



TOWN OF
VICTORIA PARK

LOCAL HISTORY AWARDS

• 2025 •



The Way We Were



Hilary Williams

Category
Personal Memoirs

Local History Awards 2025

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The Way We Were

This is a Vic Park area memoir according to my life experience and will be as accurate as my aging mind can produce. I hope the format is interesting and readable enough, and deep research is not a high priority to consolidate accuracy, for it IS a memoir. My age precludes much personal affirmation from acquaintances but at this stage my long term memory has much credibility, certainly more than short. Perhaps a little poetic licence here and there may be needed.,

In The Beginning

1952 saw my family arrive post war, as ten-pound Poms. My father had worked in the Philippines till the Great Depression, then returned by necessity to Glasgow, Scotland. He worked in the police force pre-war, as jobs were very scarce, then during and Post war, as so called "essential services". He then hankered for a return to a warmer climate, thus destination Australia.

We initially took residence in Rutland Avenue near Brigg Street at the back of the normal home of long term Scots friends, who were also earlier migrants, post war. This took the form of two modified car boxes tacked together and covered with tar paper on the walls and rickety roof, with big curtains for nominal privacy inside and a very rough plank floor.

Bathroom facilities were used in the adjacent house, though most hygiene was by boiling and using the kettle for everything in some manner. The toilet was an outside dunny, still very common at that time and had the inevitable yellow flowering toilet vine on a trellis outside for added privacy and decoration.

Next door was a fabulous playground unsurpassed, excellent for playing hidey and chasey. There were abandoned saw pits and tunnels about a metre deep, quite safe, with sawdust floors where I believe cut wood had been stored and dried carefully in order to have straight hardwood for the building of the burgeoning post war Perth. These were eventually removed and evidently the sawmills were expanded or shifted to the vast area across the railway line where the State Sawmills extended for a long way along the railway line on the Vic Park side. At seven years of age it was not a great point of interest, simply miles of stacked wood and logs across Rutland Ave. and stacked along the railway line.

Indeed I do remember steam trains chuffing along on the Armadale line, train whistle blowing periodically, and the odd soot in the eye if you

opened the sash windows for air when you travelled by train. Oats St station did not yet exist, it was Welshpool to Carlisle. Look at it all now!
mmmmmm

Bicycles took us everywhere, my father returning to his previous profession as accountant at Jasons Industries with their aluminium kitchen ware, and later, outdoor furniture and my mother to Johnsons Laundry, slogging in the heat. Both were in the Welshpool industrial complex and my elder sister rode to work at a local grocer shop, till old enough to enrol in nursing. This shop was located next to where Milnes grain storage towers still stand with Chamberlains, Plaster ceil and many others also located there.

My older brother and I pedalled to and from Carlisle Primary each day where I also remember picking kangaroo and pussy paws, spider and donkey orchids and also glorious purple hovea. It was all largely bush, dotted with old established homes inbetween and State Housing development on that route was just starting. We also used to eat "puddings," the seeds of Guildford grass on the ovals, prevalent in October at sports carnivals at Peet Park.

Kindly neighbours were housed in grand really old pre 1920's well-kept brick houses These were built many years before in Rutland Ave, along the railway line, They allowed us to climb the enormous mulberry trees, to pick and eat to our hearts content. In season, we often came home a

reddish purple. Green mulberries were considered the only cleaning solution. Also offered in February, were copious grapes from the vines which inevitably lined the access lane down to the thunderbox, outhouse or dunny, whichever term was preferred. The collector always was termed the "dunny man" and his vehicle the dunny cart. Rarely the night cart, unless you were really posh.

One day when offered grapes to take home, for the family, my mother found a single pie sized, paper bag for me, having experienced the constraints of post war rationing in Scotland. My grape lady laughed uproariously and sent me home with a full tray that my 7 year old self could hardly carry. I do not remember dates, but the steam and whistle of the Armadale to Perth trains gradually gave way to diesel and klaxon and we no longer made daisy chains from dandelions from the rail verge.

Our Wee House...The Build and Moving In.

My father and mother lost no time in acquiring Lot 527, becoming 145 Planet St. of one quarter acre and proceeded to build our own weatherboard, asbestos and tile house in the common inexpensive style of the day. I am proud to say it is still there, and the current owner, kindly gave me a copy of the house plan my father drew up in April 1952 (Enclosed). He obviously lost no time in getting started as I remember the SS Cheshire, an ex-troop-carrier in which we sailed, held a funeral service

on deck, for the newly dead King in February, as we steamed out of England...destination Perth.. Western Australia

Those were not the days of big equipment. Manual labour prevailed and one of my jobs, as we cleared the block, was to keep the fire going under some enormous stumps, in order to "burn them out", not an easy task with undried redgum hardwood. Please note that at that time, Mercury St was made of heavy super large sleepers, as was Oats St, beyond Orrong Rd, on the way to Tomato Lake. We made tin can stilts with jam tins and string, clomping happily for hours. Building cubby houses out of woolly bush was a fun thing to do and there was no shortage of bush. Digging the rubbish hole was also assigned to me, as was scrambling under the house, amongst the stumps and redbacks, in due course when building was under way. This was to retrieve "stuff" needing to be kept covered from the weather and thus kept under the house where the stumps were highest on the sloping hill block.

In the process of the build, the timber frame, was mostly done by Welsh carpenter friend Taffy Davies with the assistance of our family, mainly Dad and brother. No power drills, all hand saws etc. I actually remember Dad saying "wandoo won't do" when bending nails into the flooring. Expletives I believe were kept from little ears.

Now to start name dropping...the plumbing, including the septic tank sinking was overseen by one Mick Lee who worked from a plumbing

business at the corner of Mars and Oats St. My job was to dig sand out at the bottom of the hole, into the bucket, as the tank slid slowly down into the wet sand. Each bucket was hauled up by Mick and other stronger bodies, till the job was deemed completed. Not bad, playing with the future Lord Mayor in the sand at aged about eight. I can hear Welsh Taffy looking down, laughing and asking "How high are you down now?" Tiling was done by neighbour's grandson, again with our family and friends' help.

We also assisted South African friends, build their house in Tuckett St made of cement bricks, moulded in wooden bats. Many of these folk had migrated at that time to escape the Mau Mau terrorists. I became quite useful, in my opinion, in helping to make these, a method also used commonly to build at that time. Yes, renovated and much fixed up, it is still there.

In due course, when our house was just liveable, I remember Dad in the mornings, putting on cycle clips, taking his bike from the four we had, lined up on the side of the house and pedalling up the hill of Planet St toward Welshpool and on to Jasons Industries. By the way, we all maintained our own bikes, including me. We oiled chains, tightened as necessary, tyre pumped with hand pumps and puncture fixed. We occasionally repainted, hard work for the youngest.. My Mother now headed off in the other direction to her new job at the house and office of

one Councillor Harold Hawthorne. I suspect you have heard of him and also perhaps his trusty foreman, Tom Wright. His business was Cotton Traders, throwing out empty hessian bags to household lawns, to be picked up, hopefully full, at the letter box the following week. Mum worked at the Office/house/Clothes shed up the road.

The actual factory where the rags were sorted into different useful industrial categories, was diagonally adjacent to our house at the Oats St corner and the building is also still there. Another smaller shed, became almost a predecessor of Salvos or Good Sammy's. and was located at the back of the Hawthorne home, number 97 from memory, near the corner of Lion. A part of Mum's job was to be a second mother in the home, answer the phone for orders, sort the good wearable clothes sent up from the big factory into categories and take money from the mostly migrant customers, Slav, Italian, Poms, Greek and sundry other post war Europeans and also some aboriginals all looking for cheap work clothes. They all regularly frequented Cotton Traders esteemed shed. My brother and I were also dressed well, as Mum had first choice of supply!

At that time I do not remember a great number of Asians of any description. How things have changed! This is reflected in the length and breadth of Albany Hwy, in particular.

Unfortunately Dad died of a heart attack just before my 10th birthday, but our house was near finished by then. Money was tight so, shortly after, I

took over my brother's gardening job at the Hawthorne residence and he went on to more lucrative things. With Mum there to supervise, I received the magnificent sum of 10 bob a week!

Other Transport

At that time, there was the Carlisle Bus Service with the main sheds and depot at the corner of Lion and Mars and later taken over by the MTT. Not top of the range service or busses, but most convenient to us with a stop, going to the City, 50 metres from home. The terminus was at Oats and Tuckett St, and the route carried on to Star St and meandered through Lathlain via Streatley St to Gt Eastern Hwy. This is now Burswood Pde. and the new Great Eastern was established in due course. We all know the phenomenal Burswood development of recent times. Then on to the city with the conclusion on Georges Tce along with many other feeder destinations south and east of Perth. There was also a timetable option of the Mint Street route. The newish Oats St railway station was built and resembled a big bus stop but provided another easy option of train travel to the city. Look at it now. How times changed and are changing even more currently.

While we are thinking of the Oats St station, in that neck of the woods, near Carlisle Tafe, at that time, we kids often caught tadpoles for many hours on end, and also at the bottom of Bishopsgate St. in the reedy winter swamps. I have resumed that water connection currently by swimming at

Aqualife, virtually next door, regularly and enjoy some interaction with one and all of the myriad Asians, oldies, South Americans, Africans, therapy needers and Fifo bods.

This new diversity is also reflected at The Leisure Centre where I now play Pickleball. Kiwi, Nepalese, mothers, Afghan, old, young, Aussie, Chinese, grandchildren, Filipino are all part of the changing face of Vic Park.

Sundry Nostalgic Memories

Friends owned The Carlisle Milk Depot, the Doney family. It was run from the corner of Bishopsgate and Archer, including cool room and stables. Then, milk was in bottles, delivered on the doorstep in the middle of the night and the horses all knew their own rounds. The three sons had larger than usual gaps between fingers from carrying four, one pint bottles at a time in their hands for verandah delivery, and fence hopping to next door, so as not to have to run back to the cart. In helping at times I learned to step backwards off a moving cart! That way one did not fall on ones face!! The house is now a brightly painted physiotherapy clinic in the classic asbestos, weatherboard and tile style of the day.

Dr Laidlaw, nearby, whose surgery, also in Archer, would call at your house when required. Litis Brothers, was a greengrocer which morphed to a furniture and electrical store and is now Bella Rosa Café. I believe it is still owned by the Litis family. We would grab a string bag, pedal up to that shop, buy greengroceries as required and put them on the spring

loaded carrier at the back or basket at the front of the bike. Also well remembered is the joy and unbelievable taste of the first icypole made in our own fridge in a tiny freezer section about 30 cms x 30cms. The Iceman no longer called with his shouldered hessian padded bag and enormous block of ice, to put in the icebox compartment.

Schooling Back in the Day

Carlisle Primary was my start, followed by the second intake to the brand new Belmont High in 1957. But it was still not completed yet and would only go to third year...i.e. Junior Level. That second year of students were bussed from their previous primary e.g. Belmay, Lathlain, Rivervale, Belmont etc, to the Old Midland High building for a year till the new High School was finished.

Two years later, in the pre Xmas traditional Year 10 school holiday employment, my first full pay packet, including Saturday morning was four pounds six and eightpence. This was at Coles when it was located opposite where the Woolworths complex still is, and the Commonwealth Bank a couple of doors up...now a Gym!! Coles moved up the road and took residence in the old East Vic Park Primary location, which was relocated in Beatty St. I tell friends I used to play primary school netball in Coles...It is true..

Our house was on the boundary of the division between Governor Stirling intake and Kent St intake for year 11, and either way was maximum travel

for me in the transition to Year 11. Daunting for a 15 year old with most friends going to Gov. Stirling and a Mum with M N D. Finally, to complete my schooling I lived with my music teacher in Armagh St, pedalling up the Berwick St hill to Kent St Senior High, to unsuccessfully complete 5th year leaving. Term socials were held in the very modest church hall on the Rathay St corner of Berwick with the annual big, end of year effort, at South Perth Civic Centre. I swam in the very new Kent St Swimming Pool, passed my Bronze Star as I was too young to do the full Bronze Medallion. The brand new pool, was also a useful close option to the Springs: Ascot and Como, in the river for swimming. Money necessity took me immediately north to work as a governess. My brother, now finished at Graylands Teachers College became a primary teacher and was one of the very early teachers at the fairly new Lathlain Primary. So much for the childhood school experiences

Entertainment.

Entertainment pre television, apart from sport, clubs and pubs, and games with friends... was the movies at the local theatres. In our area it was the Carlisle RSL Hall (now part of the Harold Hawthorne Centre) with deckchairs outside in the summer. The Archer Gardens at Orrong and along with Bunnings, Petbarn and the Harper Business Building were the further theatre locations. Yes, they were originally movie theatres back in the day. There were double feature showings like most old suburban

theatres, with films such as the Doctor series and Genevieve. . We scout walked or biked in the afternoon or night, to and from, stopping for a shillings worth of hot salty chips, wrapped in butcher paper and finally layers of newspaper. They stayed hot all the way home.

All of these slowly died as TV proliferated. Fortunately the stately classic hotels on the highway have been preserved for that form of traditional entertainment, with mostly only the facilities changed to comply with consumer demand. A circumstance common to all old suburbs.

A Long While Later

After long and varied life in Melbourne and country stints, marriage, Lancelin and child, I returned to this area to experience the burgeoning mining industry, and development of neighbouring Belmont and Kewdale making the Rivervale Pub, in due course, the Empire Bar in Lathlain a post race and mining industry focussed leisure destination. This was about 50 years ago. I was housed in 3 Rowe Avenue before the remarkable unit and other infill housing development in that area exploded and also at an Archer Street duplex, and Cookham St in Lathlain. Thus the periodic ongoing familiarity at times was more noticeable to me, but like the whole metro area, inexorable. incredible infill, modernisation, change of businesses common to all suburbia existed Vic Park has morphed, embracing the very old and new requirements of the area, along with diverse classes.. Makes it interesting I think.

This all in turn also changed the face of The Town of Vic Park, as a business feeder area to the industrialising Belmont and proximity to the buzzing Welshpool. These also had a unique closeness to Perth central.

The biggest transition to me over extended time is from European migrant activity, to the increasing Asian population evident in the choice of eating and suppliers in the Café strip. I comment that you can dine in a different country every night for more than a month. Nevertheless, Sebastians, Catalanos and also Brandos, persist to add more diversity, There seems to be a very vibrant, positive and social influence. The area seems to have a unique mix of aged like me and very young, FIFO, professionals of all stripes, social housing and has a life and personality of its own, one only has to walk down the street, any street, particularly close to Albany Hwy for this to be evident. ,

Next wave:

Great Eastern Highway has seen massive transformation from being what is now Burswood Pde, framing a picturesque, well appointed and much used park. Burswood is now on the riverside, replacing the delightful rubbish dump, Swan Portland Cement and Hamburger Hill. Gone forever, the replacement being a massive noisy traffic artery now present, serving north and east. But we have the inimitable Burswood, Optus complex and developments to the river. Also the North Freeway complexes serve coastal north and west links. This I know as a retiree, returned resident of Vic

Park, I use the G O Edwards dog park regularly at all times of day. It is hard to remember Hamburger hill for late night eating, with the Burger caravan on the hill in front of the unsightly but extensive Cement Works, after passing the rubbish dump of course. I find to be the outstanding the interesting patchwork charm of the growth and change of this area, from the unchanging omnipresent John Hughes Motors... Surely an immovable icon of the area, to the high rise, long standing social housing with little charm, in streets with ancient peppermint trees with massive girths, cut down to size, so as not to interfere with power lines. Charming past tense now defunct corner shops with bird motifs brighten up the scenery. I will do one more spot of Vic Park name dropping in my memoir. In Year 11 and 12 at Kent Street I shared classes with Jenny Rossiter, whose father was another Vic Park civic icon and small corner shop owner and also with Brian, the son of Sir David Brand. Lady Meagher, 2nd wife of Sir Thomas Meagher, esteemed Doctor and also Lord Mayor, who practiced in Albany Hwy for many years was partly in my care in her dying year but that was very many decades later. The links keep happening without intention.

Places

Pubs have remained stalwart, Carlisle, Broken Hill, Victoria Park and Balmoral, reflecting their original very early Vic Park historic character, with progressive business practices to adapt to the times. Private schools tucked in midst the infill and St Joachim's with superb views, a Catholic

icon standing defiantly on the hill. The diversity of the infill, neglect of some unlucky dilapidated once pretentious homes, intricate renovation of others within the council parameters. Unit development of every style and calibre. Then there are those homes, the just plain always cared for, from the early 1900's residences. Even vacant blocks hopefully waiting profitable transformations, trimmed increasingly with for lease and sale signs. Other buildings have come and gone like the infamous Brownleigh Towers now demolished as a cess pit of crime. I lived there without any real concern on the 9th floor with my 11 year old son, after finishing Muresk in 1982.

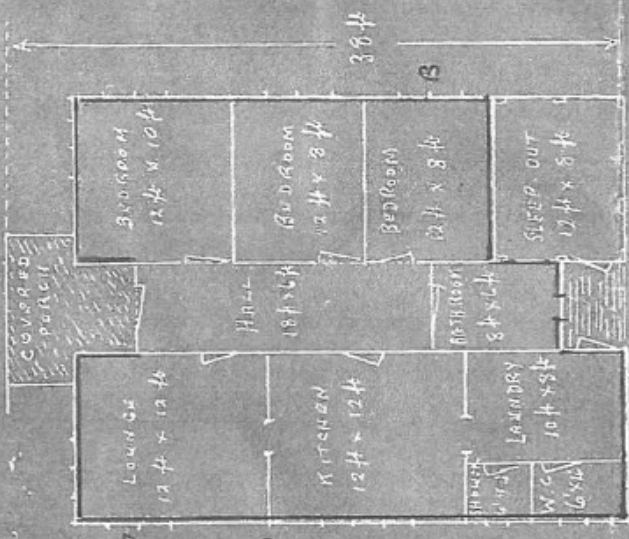
In moving back to Vic Park as a Senior Citizen, the ease and choice of services of the area is becoming evident, I do believe in my recent year of residence, it does cater well to we oldies. This then is one of the changes or indeed a continuation of the wide spectrum of convenient services for all ages with the trendy coffee shops and businesses and diverse eateries and health services concentrated from the Causeway to Welshpool Rd in a smorgasbord of choice.

Boorloo Bridge now offers a new picturesque book end on the Perth side, should one want more than the Burswood Complex offers in progressive breathtaking diversity.

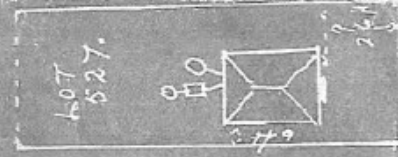
End of memoirs

This interesting exercise will never be complete, the more you delve, the more you are tempted to add. But there must be an end and this is it. My head has spun enough.

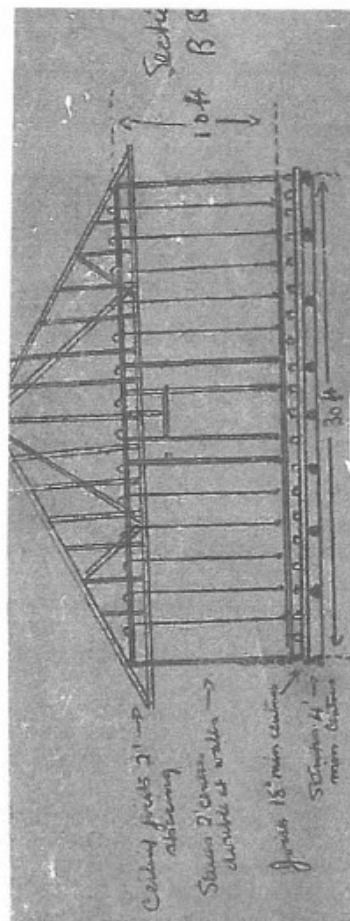
LOT No. 527
 Planet Street
 THIS BUILDING IS BEING ERECTED IN
 REPLY TO THE ORDER OF THE
 JOHN F. CORNFORD
 30th April 1952



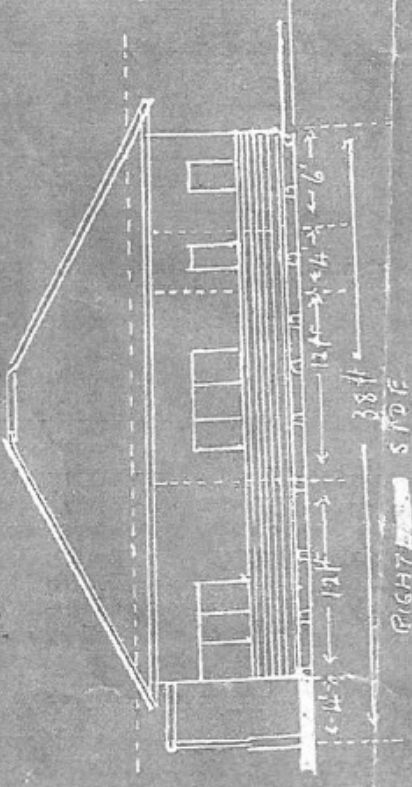
4th
 10th
 12th
 14th



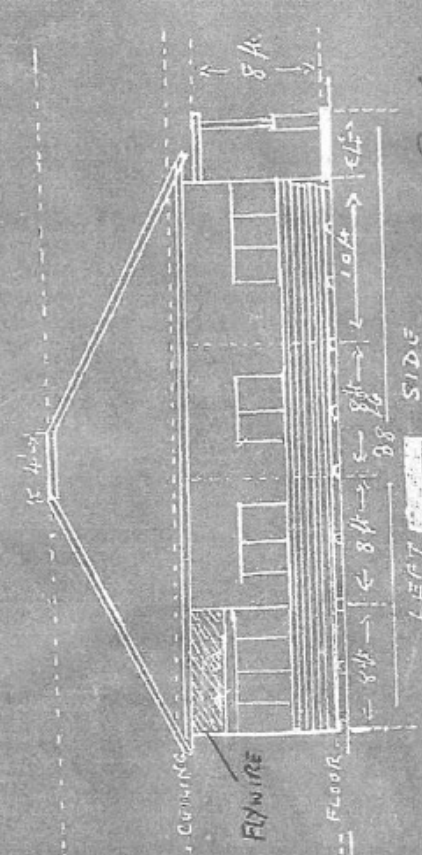
PLAN.



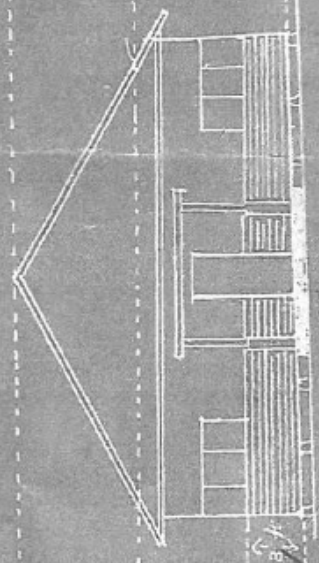
Section B B
 Ceiling joists 3" →
 abutting
 Slaves 2" water
 double at water →
 Joists 18" max spacing
 Structure of
 main ceiling



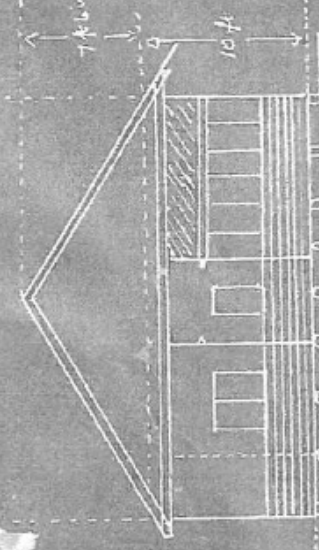
RIGHT SIDE



LEFT SIDE



FRONT



REAR

3'6" Plan of Proposed

Weatherboard House with Wood Roof for
 John F. Cornford on Lot 527 - Planet Street.

Scale 1" = 8 ft.

COUNCIL COPY

- 2 MAY 1952
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John F. Cornford