

Recollections of *Burnham Grove*

Written by Jenny Akers in conversations with Edna Marshall July/Aug 2008.

Edna May Wheeler was born in Camden at Nurse Taplins in Oxley St on July 25 1917. Her grandmother was Elizabeth May Doust and grandfather Frederick Joseph Doust who had the house *Burnham Grove* built for his bride. The builder is unknown.

The extended family lived in this house for the next 80 years, only selling it in 1974.

This is the story of that house & era through Edna's eyes.

But first a word about the house.....

Burnham Grove is one of four historic houses along Cawdor Road built by families who took up clearing leases from the Macarthurs, the others being, Oldham Hills, Mayfield, and Lloyd Smart's house which has burned down.

The property contains a late nineteenth century house at its centre. With a single storey with enclosing verandas, its plan is a typical four square with two rear wings. The house is approached along a long straight driveway leading from the gates on Cawdor road.

The first house on the property, its garden and a stables/barn building probably date from about 1860. The property was first occupied by the Frederick Joseph Doust family.

The house is set within very extensive gardens in which are formed a rose bush lined drive, an oval lawn around a garden, a hedge maze, a hedged round lawn, a fountain garden along with several other planted areas. The perimeter of the grounds is hedged & fenced.

Beyond the house enclosure to the south is a paddock containing a large stable/barn, dating from the nineteenth century, possibly as early as the 1860s, of slab construction but dilapidated. Nearby are the remains of an early milking race and another poultry shed. To the west of the house paddock, situated on a low spur, is the substantial remains of a garden relating to an earlier, demolished house. Again there are perimeter hedges, fence posts, great pine trees and a path leading to a level area where the house stood. A small dairy building from the 1920s stood there but was in a very dilapidated condition and was demolished.

Elizabeth & Frederick had two children. Bertha, Edna's mum, was their only daughter and a son Frederick also who was born after his father died.

Frederick Doust, Edna's grandfather, a very tall & imposing man, had the house & stables built in the 1850s from local bricks & timber for his bride, Elizabeth May Dengate. The plans were identical to *Mt Hercules* on Razorback, which was owned by Elizabeth Dengate's family except that *Mt Hercules*, which is still standing, was built from weatherboards. It is worthy of note that the main house has not been altered significantly to this very day. It is speculation that he may have been preparing the house for Elizabeth's sister as his bride as it seems carefully planned & not hastily done, but she died.

There was a cottage built from slab timber out the back which has been occupied by a great number of people ranging from tenants to family members. The stables were built to house his horses as well as his road building & engineering equipment.

The farm was approximately 80 acres. After Frederick's death from meningitis in 1900, at the age of 36 years, Edna's dad, Raymond Charles Wheeler, worked in town in Mrs Stone's grocery shop for some time before he began dairying. Edna's grandmother, Elizabeth May Doust, lived in the house with the extended family as a widow till 1936 when she died aged 63 years. She left the house to Edna's mum, Bertha. It is from this time that *Burnham Grove* became known as the Wheeler house.

In 1917 Bertha Florist Doust married Raymond Charles Wheeler. Edna had four siblings: two sisters, Ethel Florist & Lola Hope & two brothers, Frank Victor & Arthur Raymond. Lola, 10 years Edna's junior, was born at *Burnham Grove*. Edna remembers the midwife was Minnie McNiven and the children were sent out to the shed till it was all over. Edna is the only child still living.

Edna waited till Ethel was old enough for the two girls to go to school together in Camden. The sisters were only 13 months apart in age. They were taken by horse & sulky. Later Edna rode the two and a half miles to school on a bicycle. She double dinked Frank till he was old enough to ride his own bike & then she "dinked" Arthur.

When the big floods came up it always caused great excitement as the roads into & out of Camden were cut and the children could not go to school.

Edna left school when she was 15 years old & returned to the house fulltime to help her mum, Bertha Florist Wheeler. They had no electricity & only well water.

According to Edna, Monday every week was wash day. Mum had to boil up the clothes in the copper in the back yard, rinse them in the wooden tubs, rinse them again in the "blue rinse", put them through the mangle & then hang them on the wire line strung between two trees.

Tuesday was ironing day with the irons heated on the fuel stove." It took me all day to do this job".

The well water was sweet & never ran dry as far as Edna can recollect. The whole well was lined with bricks & covered with a wooden hatch cover. It is still there today. The family had to pump the water from the well up to the holding tank on the roof of the woodhouse where they stored the wood for the fuel stove in the kitchen.

From Edna's earliest memory the family had horses, seven of them at one stage: Dolly & Short pulled the plough, Chester pulled the milk cart, Win was a trotter, although it's not clear if she raced for money, and Edna's pony, Beauty. Edna used to ride Beauty to sewing lessons in Narellan when she was 20. Frank had two beautiful horses, Tony & Duke. Tony starred in the film "Bush Christmas".

"In 1927 Dad started a milk run in Camden, delivering fresh milk by horse & cart to the residents of Camden. The milk was measured out in quart pots, pint pots & half pint pots into billies & jugs left out by the customers. Frank & Arthur helped out on this run in 1940s. Dad had this run for 23 years, previously the milk went to the factory in Camden."

When Edna was young Cawdor Road was a dusty track & she remembers sitting at the front gate with her brothers waiting to see the riders in the famous Goulburn to Sydney bicycle race. They would give the riders a drink of water. In 1934 while still living at *Burnham Grove* Edna learned to drive in her Grandma's Baby Austin car. When she was 20 she rolled it one night in the main street of Camden on her way to the Hospital Ball.

As far as Edna recalls, the family wasn't affected greatly by the Great Depression because they grew so much of their own food. "There was a big orchard out back with plum, peach & pear trees which Mum preserved the fruit & made jams. We also made our own butter." They kept chooks & ducks but got their meat from the butcher in Camden (Dunks and then Tildsleys).

During the depression years Dad caught rabbits, "a lot of them" on Razorback on the property Grandma owned there. The family ate the meat and Dad sold the skins. Mum got the bread from Mr Tomkins, the baker who delivered it by horse & cart "in a great big basket". In better times the grocer came & took orders & delivered the goods later.

Edna & her sister shared a bedroom & her brothers shared another "off the dining room." When Ethel died on May 2 1925 from diphtheria at the age of 6 years her mum did not open the room again. Edna moved in to share her Grandma's room.

When we think about these old times inevitably the old chamber pot comes to mind. There was an unusual double toilet out the back of Burnham Grove which is still there today. Edna's father emptied the nightsoil from the kerosene tins they used in the toilets.

Dad was Church of England and Mum was Methodist. Edna went to St Johns with Dad. Her "mum was too busy to go to Church". The kids also went to Sunday school at Cawdor Methodist church. *Burnham Grove* was equidistant from Camden & Cawdor. (two and a half miles each way) and everyone walked to Sunday school..

"During World War Two Dad worked in Clifton's grocery shop as they were relatives. Arthur went to war but Frank was not called up as dairying was considered essential services. The mailman called twice a week and rode a horse."

Edna's father put in a tennis court out the back which was used by several generations of Wheeler/Dousts & others. Bruce Ferguson was Edna's doubles partner & both of them were left handed! Edna & her brothers played tennis all around the district.

Hawkers called at the house regularly & usually camped in the paddock next to the house & had dinner with the family. Robert Mawdsley, the son of one of these hawkers, was given a job on Edna's dad's milk run. In 1939 Edna and Robert subsequently married & had three children. They lived in the main house till after their first child Alan was born, when they moved into Sydney.

"At that stage Mum & Dad, Frank, Arthur and Lola lived in the main house. Various tenants lived in the cottage. Grandma looked after the formal garden & it looked lovely with flowers". The three Bunya pines beside the front gate & in the front yard were possibly planted by Grandma. Edna remembers the Osage orange hedge "with great big thorns" all around the house and another olive hedge on the dairy side of the house. Edna's Dad used to trim them all.

After marriage difficulties Edna moved back from Sydney to Oxley Street, Camden in 1951 so she and her children spent most weekends at *Burnham Grove*. At this time to make a living Edna began a dressmaking business from home in Oxley Street (cottage opposite Woollies now) & was a talented seamstress making exquisite wedding gowns & other frocks. During these seven years she met a sergeant in the police station, John Thomas Marshall (Jack) who helped her to get a job scrubbing the courthouse floors.

Jack already had a daughter and was 15 years Edna's senior but after asking her to cook his meals he subsequently asked her to marry him. It took 5 years for them both to get their divorces ("not nearly so easy in those days") and in 1955 they married and moved to Parkes. After transfers to Broken Hill & Bathurst Jack, Edna & their daughter Doreen moved back to Burnham Grove in 1960. They left Alan as a jackaroo on Mt Stuart station & lived in the cottage. "Mum & Dad were the only ones in the main house." Edna & Jack clad the slab cottage with fibro & added another room. There were no changes to the main house.

After Dad died in 1964 Mum suffered worse from "nerves" and didn't want to be alone so there were several families who lived in the main house to look after Mum & keep her company. In 1966 Edna & Jack moved to Homebush.

In 1973 Mum died at the age of 73 years and since no one in the family could raise the capital to pay the death duties the house was sold after approx. 80 years in the Wheeler/Doust family. The house & one acre around it was left to the girls, Edna & Lola. The farm was left to the boys, Frank and Arthur, who had previously had blocks subdivided from the farm.

Edna & Lola cleaned out all the furniture & personal effects and that was the last time Edna was in the house. Their Mum & Dad are buried in Cawdor Methodist cemetery. Grandma & Grandfather Doust are in the Methodist cemetery in Cawdor and Ethel's grave is in St John's Camden cemetery.

Burnham Grove underwent two restorations in 1984 and 1996 when a new garden was added. The property is currently owned by Dr Whitton. The grounds & magnificent gardens are used for weddings & corporate events. The original gardens were restored faithfully & no doubt provide great enjoyment to the guests and are still fondly remembered by the family.

Edna lost her daughter Lorraine aged 5 years & 11 months in 1951. Her son, Alan who changed his name to Marshall when he turned 21, died in Broken Hill in 1991, aged 51 years. When Alan was born he was the first of the fifth generation of Wheelers living. Her daughter, Doreen, is married to Garry Peace & they have three children. Now Edna has six great grandchildren and at 91 feels very blessed.

One can only muse on how Grandfather Doust's ideas & planning have been enjoyed by members of his family & other owners for such a long time. *Burnham Grove* will always live vividly in the family memories.