

CAMDEN HISTORY

Journal of the Camden Historical Society



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CAMDEN HISTORY

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Meetings are held at 7.30 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month except in January. They are held in the Museum. Visitors are always welcome.

Museum

The Museum is located at 40 John Street, Camden, phone 4655 3400. It is open Thursday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., except at Christmas. Visits by schools and groups are encouraged. Please contact the Museum to make arrangements. Entry is free.

Camden History, Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc

The Journal is published in March and September each year. The Editor would be pleased to receive articles broadly covering the history of the Camden district. Correspondence can be sent to the Society's postal address. The views expressed by authors in journal articles are solely those of the authors and not necessarily endorsed by the Camden Historical Society.

Donations

Donations made to the Society are tax deductible. The accredited value of objects donated to the Society are eligible for tax deduction.

Front Cover: Display Camellia, Cowell's Camellia Nursery (C Cowell)

Back Cover: Aerial view of Cowell's Camellia Nursery, Theresa Park (C Cowell)

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Cowell's Camellia Nursery, Theresa Park, 1970-2000

Charles Cowell

My wife Helen has always loved gardening. After our three children had started school, she began propagating and growing fuchsias. In the early seventies I built a small bush house for her as fuchsias need protection from the summer heat and winter frosts. Helen wholesaled some plants to a retail nursery and they then doubled the price and neglected to give her plants the care they needed.

This was the impetus for starting our own nursery. We had a sign made with an arrow pointing down Terry Road, off Werombi Road at Theresa Park. There was much jubilation when our first customer turned into our driveway. Initially our customers were locals and people out for a weekend drive who stumbled across us. In the following years, we developed a reputation for quality plants and grower information that brought people from all over NSW and even some from interstate.

Fuchsias are sensitive plants in our hot climate, with dehydrating winds. Plants could look good one day and shrivelled up the next. We were also very keen on camellias and had joined the Camellia Society which was based in Gordon. The first camellia show that we attended was in the early eighties.

We took along a few freshly picked blooms which were carefully packed in foam boxes and sprayed with water. On arrival at the show, blooms were placed in the containers provided. They were organized in named classes and competitors were then ushered outside while judging occurred.



Camellia Japonica Moshio (C Cowell)

When the hall reopened after lunch, we wandered around the many tables of blooms, admiring varieties which we did not have and writing down the names of those which we wanted to purchase. We came to the

head table displaying the champions and much to our astonishment one of our blooms was draped in a ribbon which said ‘Grand Champion Flower of the Show’.

We made many friends in the camellia societies at Gordon, St George District, Berry and Illawarra. Members of these groups were always willing to share knowledge and plants. A wonderful friend Jim Powell was a great collector and would pick up new varieties that he thought we would love for our collection, on his travels across the east coast of Australia.

This led us to concentrate our efforts on growing camellias and azaleas. Camden’s climate is ideal for growing both. One of our regular customers, Chris Chapman a builder from Silverdale, became a great friend. He visited the nursery every week collecting all the varieties we had and he started showing camellias. To this day he wins championship blooms at every competition which he enters.

It is essential to have some shade for Camellia Japonicas with pale colours. Many red varieties can take full sun. However the magnificent camellia



In the early eighties we constructed a Tea Room on the back lawn, where customers could make themselves a cuppa and sit for a while. (C Cowell)



Helen with the plants which were sent to Japan (C Cowell)

sasanquas, which bloom earlier in autumn, will take full sun, even the whites and pale pinks.

Our nursery expanded every year and I gave up my outside job. I needed to help Helen and build shade houses and water systems for the plants. I found myself constantly building new shade houses. I knew how to weld and so pipe frames covered in shade cloth were erected. By the time we sold our business in 2000, approximately two acres of land housed the nursery and display gardens. We cultivated approximately five hundred camellia varieties.

In the early days we did not have much money to spend on advertising. We did have an attractive garden around our home and this was expanded as we collected more and more camellia and azalea varieties. Once the nursery was more established we advertised on radio 2GB during the gardening segment and we also had celebrity gardeners Don Burke and Graham and Sandra Ross visit and film segments for their television shows. Helen also spoke to numerous groups including garden clubs, Inner wheel and Rotary Clubs.



Our largest shade house being built. (C Cowell)

Visitors were always interested to see how plants were propagated and nourished and enjoyed this experience, not available at a normal retail nursery. We even shipped some varieties of camellias to Japan for a special display garden when it was their turn to host a worldwide meeting of camellia enthusiasts. Bob Cherry who was owner of Paradise Plants, Kulnura NSW, took on the role of packing and shipping the camellias to Japan.

Betty Yewen, a member of the Camden Historical Society who ran Betty Hunt Promotions, brought hundreds of tours to our nursery over the years. In the eighties, Betty would join coaches and we were one part of the grand tour of the area, pointing out Sydney University Farms, market gardens, dairies and other local attractions. People appreciated Betty's knowledge of our beautiful rural area, and her ability to answer questions. A camellia growing sheet, with a "how to get there" map was always handed out to our visitors, who often returned again with family, this time to purchase plants.

Camellias and azaleas are both best planted in the garden during the cooler months of the year. We always discouraged customers from buying and planting out in the heat of summer. The nursery's busiest time was on weekends from April through to the end of September. Our three children helped in the business while at high school and university. We also employed two local ladies on the weekends who were garden enthusiasts and became friends.

In the early days of our nursery, printed photo tags were not available. For customers insisting on purchasing during non-flowering time, we needed photos of the different varieties to show colours and shape. This led me to join



The large shade house now full of plants at various stages of growth, we were able to pump water from the Nepean and store it in a dam just beyond the previous photograph. (C Cowell)

the Campbelltown Photographic Society, and learn to take better photos and print my own promotional material.

On reflection, we are most proud that we were always truthful with our customers. For example, a light coloured Camellia Japonica will struggle to grow in a full sun position and we would make sure that our customers picked the correct variety for the spot they had at home. We would let them know that Sasanqua camellias are very hardy and make superb hedges or specimen plants.

In the year 2000 we sold the nursery as we had reached retirement age and our children were established in their own careers. We were both unsure how town life would be after rural living for so many years. We need not have worried, although very close to Argyle Street Camden we have a wonderful outlook over 'Macarthur Park'. Sadly, after a number of years the purchaser of our nursery became very ill and had to close it down.



The Nepean River in flood 1978 taken from our front veranda (C Cowell)

Helen and I are now in our eighties and can look back with great satisfaction at our lives. We enjoyed building up our nursery from scratch, it was very hard but enjoyable work. We met so many wonderful people and made life-long friends. We can drive around Camden and admire many mature camellias that we sold to Camden residents so many years back. Our 1200 square metre block is full of camellias and azaleas. The task of choosing favourites for our retirement garden was an enjoyable challenge! In retirement, Helen has also developed a passion for succulents and she has many varieties which she propagates and donates to local charity shops.

Onslow Assembly Hall, Camden

Dianne Matterson

Joseph Toll had been the publican of the Camden Inn (now the Royal Hotel) for about five years, when in the autumn of 1889, he contracted Richard Hinder, a local builder of repute, to construct a large hall facing into Elizabeth Street at the rear of the hotel. This venture was, perhaps, a means of investing some of the £3,000 Joe had won in July 1888 at Moore Park, Sydney, after betting on a local runner in the Carrington Handicap.¹

*The host of the Camden Inn, Mr. Joe Toll, is having a large hall erected on the property adjoining his hotel in Elizabeth Street. The hall when completed will be an ornament as well as an acquisition to Camden, and will supply a long-felt want.*²

Initially known as Toll's Assembly Hall, by July 1889, the structure was renamed the Onslow Assembly Hall in honour of James Onslow, and was said to be the largest public building between Goulburn and Sydney. Measuring 150' x 50', the building could accommodate about 1000 people and was constructed from galvanised iron, with a 'beautiful matai floor' that had been laid for skating.³ Matai wood is native to New Zealand and was much admired for its tight grain, hard wearing nature and its silky appearance when it was polished.

*A grand ball was given in the Onslow Assembly Hall, under the auspices of the Camden Reserve Rifle company, on Friday evening last. Upwards of 170 people attended, and the affair was decidedly the best ever held in the district. The commodious hall was splendidly decorated with gay-coloured flags etc., and the display of ladies' costumes was undoubtedly such as has rarely, if ever, been seen in a local ballroom. The catering, in the hands of Mrs. Huntley, was admirably conducted, whilst the music supplied by Messrs. W.H. Paling & Co., was first class... The members of the company deserve every credit for the manner in which the affair was arranged and carried out.*⁴

* * * * *

*...the hall recently erected by Mr. Joe Toll presented a brilliant appearance from the magnificent array of ladies' costumes and splendid decorations... Two special trams were run for the occasion.*⁵

Roller skating first appeared in the 18th century in the performing arts, but

F. LASSETTER and CO., Limited.



ROLLER SKATES.

The "Champion" Skate.

The "Belgrave" Skate.

The "Plimpton" Skate.

These Skates are
FURNISHED WITH EITHER LIGNUM VITAE OR
STEEL WHEELS

SKATES REPAIRED.

Published Free & Coverts Journal, 9 May 1885

Australian Town and Country Journal, 9 May 1885

didn't become widespread in the general community as the two-wheeled design didn't allow for the skater to turn unless they came to a stop first. However, with design improvements, the use of rubber wheels and the introduction of four-wheeled 'turning skates', the popularity of skating had soared by the 1880s, both as a form of exercise and a source of entertainment. The invention of ball bearing skates by Mr. Skinner in 1888 improved the manoeuvrability and versatility of roller skates, and specialised skating events such as figure skating and speed skating were held across the country. It was a pastime enjoyed by the young and the not so young, as well as by both men and women, but by 1910, the skating heyday had passed and wouldn't reach the same levels of popularity again until the 1950s.⁶

*SKATING.—This invigorating pastime is very popular just now in Camden, and Mr. Toll's grand rink is well patronised by the votaries of skating. Mr. Bailey gives exhibitions of fancy and trick skating every Saturday night.*⁷

* * * * *

*The opening heats of a one-mile skating handicap were run off in Toll's Assembly Hall on Saturday night. The rink was well patronised, and the events rather exciting.*⁸

In October 1889, a farewell was held in the Onslow Assembly Hall for Albert Bailey, the acting manager of the skating rink, who was preparing to leave Camden. During the evening, he gave an exhibition of a 'sensational toboggan act' and 'fancy trick skating', which was well received by the audience.

After a short time had been devoted to skating, Mr. Bailey appeared on the

*skates and performed several clever feats. His sensational descent from the roof of the building on the toboggan plank was greeted with rounds of applause. During the evening a half-mile contest on skates took place between the brothers Percy and Bertie Huntley, two local boys ; Percy conceding his younger brother about a quarter of a lap start. After a good race, the former won.*¹⁰

When the newly-formed Camden Municipal Council proposed borrowing £1000, a well-attended public meeting was held in the Onslow Assembly Hall to discuss the matter. Many ratepayers abstained from the vote, resulting in the Council proceeding with the loan.

*An indignation meeting convened by a ratepayer was held at the Onslow Assembly Hall last night, when about 300 people put in an appearance. The meeting was a very noisy one. Ultimately the meeting decided to test the feeling of the ratepayers present in reference to borrowing £1000 for the improvement of the streets and roads, and the chairman, Mr. Luker, announced that 38 were opposed to borrowing, and 3 for. The Mayor and aldermen were present. The council have decided to borrow the money, and are calling for tenders for the loan.*¹¹

In October 1890, a 'skating and dancing carnival' was held in the hall in aid of Camden Cricket Club.

*The first part of the evening was devoted to skating, and, later, dancing was indulged in by those present... During the evening, the Camden Brass Band played several lively selections, and also all the dance music. About seventy persons were present and everybody seemed well pleased with the evening's amusement.*¹²

During its brief existence, the Onslow Assembly Hall was in constant use for balls, concerts, bazaars, election speeches, skating events and public meetings, as well as by the Light Horse and the Camden Reserve Rifle Company for military drills and rifle matches – a diversity of use that is highlighted by the following extracts:

On the second night of the show, March 5, a promenade concert and ball was held in the Onslow Assembly Hall, in aid of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Camden. Between 90 and 100 couples were present. Dancing was kept up with great vigor till early in the morning. Mr. Fritz Zglinicki acted as master of the ceremonies and was ably assisted by Mr. J.A. Bugden. The music was supplied by Mr. Steadman of Sydney, and was all that could be desired. Several ladies also contributed by playing extras during the evening. Mr. James A. Salter catered and provided refreshment in a highly creditable manner.

*The party dispersed about daylight and everybody seemed to have spent a pleasant evening.*¹³

* * * * *

*Mr. McCourt, Mr. J.G. Morris, Mr. D. Morrice, and Mr. Throsby, the freetrade candidates addressed a large meeting in the Onslow Assembly Hall, Camden, on Monday evening, the Mayor, Mr. F.H. Burne, presiding. Messrs. McCourt and Morris spoke well on freetrade, federation, one man one vote, local government and the labour federation and were enthusiastically received. Messrs. Throsby and Morrice also addressed the meeting. The general opinion in Camden is that Messrs. McCourt, Morris and Cullen will be the freetrade bunch.*¹⁴

* * * * *

*A large and influential public meeting of the residents of Camden and the surrounding district was held in the Onslow Assembly Hall on Friday evening... to protest against the exorbitant charges made in conveying livestock, merchandise &c., on the Camden and Campbelltown tramway, to advocate the erection of suitable station-houses at Camden and Narellan, and to consider other matters in connection with the line. A number of resolutions were adopted, one of which was,—“The residents of Camden and district consider that they are placed under great disadvantages by the present system of charges made on the Camden and Campbelltown tramway.” The Mayor and aldermen of Camden and the local Parliamentary representative were appointed as a deputation to wait upon the [Railway] Commissioners.*¹⁵

* * * * *

*The bazaar in connection with the Wesleyan Church held in the Onslow Assembly Hall proved a financial success. The concerts and tableaux held in the evenings drew large crowds of people. The funds go towards the new parsonage.*¹⁶

* * * * *

Captain Sparrow, the adjutant of the New South Wales Mounted Infantry Regiment... inspected Camden G Company Mounted Infantry on the 13th instant, when 24 members were passed as efficient. At the conclusion of the parade, the captain expressed himself as astonished at the dilatory way many of the members attended drill. He fully expected to see a full muster. In the night time the company were again drilled in the Onslow Assembly Hall, Captain Cuthell, the instructor of musketry, being present. The committee of

*the Camden Reserve Rifle Club, with a view to encouraging the younger members to shoot, have divided them into two classes – namely, A and B. The A class will compete at 500 and 600 yards, and the B class at 400 and 500 yards. The charge for marking has also been dispensed with.*¹⁷

When the Mounted Infantry and Camden Reserve Rifle Club held a ‘grand ball’ in the Onslow Assembly Hall in July 1892, little did they know that this was going to be one of the last occasions anyone would dance or skate across its carefully polished matai wood floor.

*A grand ball under the auspices of the Mounted Infantry and the Reserve Rifle Club was held in the Onslow Assembly Hall on Friday evening last, and was a grand success, about 80 couples being present. The hall was tastefully decorated with flags, Chinese lanterns, and rifles and bayonets. A number of visitors from Sydney and elsewhere were present. The music was supplied by Hardy’s band, and was first-class. The refreshments, which were supplied by the public, were first-class. The ball was in aid of funds for the erection of iron targets at the rifle range [at Macquarie Grove].*¹⁸

With the exception of the kitchen and a storeroom, Onslow Assembly Hall and skating rink were destroyed by fire one night in August 1892. A portion of the timber and iron building was partitioned off and used to store rifles, overcoats and other equipment by the Light Horse infantry. These items were valued at about £100. A lot of ammunition was stored in the hall and during the fire, ‘bullets were flying in every direction’. The mounted band lost the large drums and two mounted drums, along with their uniforms. The building was insured with the Commercial Union Assurance Company for £450 and the contents insurance amounted to £50.¹⁹

*The Camden skating rink was burnt down at one o’clock on Tuesday morning last. A great explosion took place during the progress of the fire, owing to a number of boxes of cartridges, which had been stowed away, exploding.*²⁰

Three years later, the hall was replaced by Major Macarthur Onslow who built a Drill Hall for the Light Horse on the south-eastern corner of the Recreation Ground (Onslow Park) adjacent to the Crown Hotel. Today, this building is known as the A H & I Hall/Show Society Hall, but, initially, there was some confusion about what the public should call the new structure...

*The Mounted Rifle Drill Hall has of late been designated as the Onslow Assembly Hall, the latter is incorrect. The Hall was built for the purpose of the Mounted Rifles—as such should be henceforth known.*²¹

In an era when every town had to take a proactive approach towards the well-

being of their community – their entertainment, fundraising, civic affairs, information gathering and town growth – a facility such as the Onslow Assembly Hall would have been most welcome. So, despite the fact that it only existed for three years, there can be little doubt the Camden community valued the amenity it brought to the town during this period, and were grateful for the foresight of Joe Toll, who had endowed them with a prominent venue for a plethora of social, civic and military events.

Author's note: the spelling, punctuation and word usage in all extracts in this article have been reproduced as they appear in the original.

Notes

- 1 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 27 Jul 1889. *Australian Star*, 7 Jul 1888
- 2 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 25 May 1889
- 3 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 22 Jun 1889; 6 Jul 1889
- 4 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 20 Jul 1889
- 5 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 27 Jul 1889
- 6 Social History Society (socialhistory.org.uk): *Get Your Skates On: The Victorian Roller Revolution*, K. Brooks. State Library of Victoria (slv.vic.gov.au): *Roller-mania in 19th-century Victoria*. Referee, 5 Jul 1888
- 7 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 27 Jul 1889
- 8 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 10 Aug 1889
- 9 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 19 Oct 1889
- 10 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 19 Oct 1889
- 11 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 Oct 1889
- 12 *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 4 Oct 1890
- 13 *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 14 Mar 1891
- 14 *Bowral Free Press & Berrima District Intelligencer*, 17 Jun 1891
- 15 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 25 Jul 1891
- 16 *Daily Telegraph*, 19 Sept 1891
- 17 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 23 Jan 1892
- 18 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 23 Jul 1892. *Camden News*, 28.5.1896
- 19 *Evening News*, 16 Aug 1892. *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser*, 20 Aug 1892
- 20 *Nepean Times*, 20 Aug 1892
- 21 *Camden News*, 19 Sept 1895

J.D. Rankin

Builder, Joiner, Timber Merchant, Undertaker, Popular Citizen, and Mayor of Camden

Jo O'Brien

A grand gravestone stands in St John's Anglican Cemetery, Camden, a poignant memorial to a man who contributed so much to the town of Camden in a busy life of civic service and industry, despite personal tragedy and a life cut short. His name is J.D. Rankin.



**Rankin gravestone at St John's, Camden
(Rebecca Mangion)**



**J.D. Rankin (Camden
Municipal Council 1894,
detail) (CHS)**

James Downie Rankin was born in 1861 in Kilsyth, Scotland, the eldest child of Henry Rankin, an engineer, and his wife Margaret (nee Downie). James proudly used his middle name Downie throughout his life. James worked as a cartwright and joiner¹ before emigrating to New South Wales between 1881 and 1884 where he is recorded working at Mount Hunter Creek.²

At St Mark's Greendale, on the 26th of May 1886, James married Elizabeth Latty, daughter of Robert Latty and Martha (nee Davis)³ of Shancamore (a property south of Greendale). A daughter, Annie Amelia was born later that year.

In June 1888 J.D. Rankin was the successful tenderer for the construction of buildings for the new public school at Cawdor, at a cost of £685/10s.⁴ Its completion was celebrated with a banquet held by James in the building in November that year.⁵ J.D. Rankin was awarded another government contract for work at Picton school in December 1888⁶ as well as other government work in the area over the next few years.

The family were living in Camden in April 1891 when James began advertising his services as an undertaker, in the funeral notices of the *Sydney Morning Herald* – ‘will meet all trains with his hearse at Camden, Narellan, Campbelltown, Menangle, and Picton as per arrangements’.⁷

In September 1892, James nominated for a vacant seat on Camden Council,



Camden Municipal Council 1894. J. D. Rankin is seated at the right end of the front row. (Camden Historical Society)

with a close contest predicted with the only other candidate W.C. Furner.⁸ Furner was successful, but James nominated again in January 1893 when there was another vacancy, and this time he was elected as a councillor.⁹

A second daughter Rita May was born in February 1894.

In August 1894 Lodge Abbotsford (later to be the Camden Masonic Lodge) was consecrated – ‘The place of meeting was in the upper room of the timber rack on the property of Bro. J. D. Rankin, a local builder at the corner of Argyle and John streets’.¹⁰ J.D. Rankin was involved with many other local societies over his years in Camden including the Camden A.H. and I. Society, and the Royal Foresters.

From the earliest issues of the Camden News in 1895, J.D. Rankin advertised his business as a Joiner, Builder, Contractor and Timber Merchant, as well as Undertaker, with a decorative advertisement including a picture illustrating the ‘first class’ hearse he had built.¹¹

James always seemed to be busy. In June 1895, ‘The tender of Mr. J. D. Rankin has been accepted for the erection of the extensive refrigerating works which Mr. A. J. Onslow Thompson purposes to erect in Camden’,¹² James being chosen from 11 tenders. This became the butter-making and bacon-curing factory at Elizabeth Street, Camden, which was opened in April 1896.


J.D. Rankin was elected Mayor in October 1895 after the resignation of then Mayor Alderman Noakes who was leaving the area. The *Camden News* reports in an opinion piece:

After offering the chairmanship to this and that Alderman who each in turn declined the proffered honor; the choice at last fell on Alderman J. D Rankin, who Scotchman like had during the evening “thought, but spoke not.” The

J. D. Rankin,

JOINER, BUILDER, CONTRACTOR,
AND
Timber Merchant,
CAMDEN.

Estimates furnished. All orders reasonable- executed
Grand Stock of Timber for building and fencing
kept in stock.



STATE FUNERALS.

J. D. RANKIN,

UNDERTAKER &c,
ARGYLE STREET, CAMDEN,

Begs to inform the residents of Camden and adjoining districts that he has built a first-class HEARSE to meet the requirements of the Undertaking Business. For the use of the Hearse, a moderate charge will be made.
The Hearse will meet any train at Camden, Narellan, Campbelltown, Menangle, or Pictou, as per arrangement.
The Hearse on hire. Terms reasonable.
Large stock of first-class Funeral Furniture on hand.

Camden News, 13 Jun 1895.

vote was unanimously in favor of Alderman Rankin.¹³

In the 1896 election Alderman Rankin was re-elected Mayor, the Camden News reporting:

*Mr. J. D. Rankin has just completed his first term of office, and may with confidence face his masters. Although not a speaker, he is possessed of good sound common sense, and has always made his ideas explicit in few plain words. He is a staunch advocate of water supply for Camden, and his views on matters municipal have always been fearlessly made.*¹⁴

In April 1896, it was mentioned at a council meeting that Mrs Rankin had been ill.¹⁵ The following council meeting was contentious as council considered the matter of the Council Clerk's irregular behaviour with respect to council's finances. Though J.D. Rankin's handling of the matter was strongly supported by the majority, and a motion of censure raised and defeated, J.D. Rankin did not intend to remain as mayor, and resigned as mayor and alderman.¹⁶ Perhaps with his wife unwell, he did not wish to continue with the additional stresses and argy-bargy of local politics. The *Camden News* reflected that he would 'be kindly remembered and appreciated'.¹⁷ Later that year it was noted that: 'Mr Rankin has been for many years a hard working and intelligent alderman, and we regret much his absence from the Camden Council'.¹⁸

After leaving council, J.D. Rankin focussed on his business interests. In August of 1896, it was reported:

*Mr. J.D. Rankin, builder and contractor, and the ex-Mayor of Camden, has already made various additions to his large building and joinery plant, and farther by purchasing the entire extensive stock of timber etc., of Mr. W.C. Furner, J.P., the present Mayor of Camden. It is, we are informed, the intention of Mr. Rankin to devote the yards lately occupied by Mr. W. C. Furner wherein to store the hardwood timber, leaving the yards at the corner of John and Argyle streets to the making up and working of same. Mr. Rankin has recently added several expensive labour saving machinery to his extensive plant and will thus have practically the whole of the timber trade of Camden entirely in his own hand.*¹⁹

Elizabeth's father Robert Latty died from a severe attack of influenza, aged 78, while visiting the Rankins' home in Camden in April 1897. His obituary states that 'Mr J.D. Rankin, Camden, ably conducted the funeral arrangements'.²⁰ James attended to the arrangements for his father-in-law's funeral, as he had done for so many other local families.



Rankin grave at St John's (Rebecca Mangion)

In April 1897 James installed the new bells in the belfry at St John's church²¹ and in July successfully tendered for work repointing the church tower and improving ventilation.²² In June 1897 J.D. Rankin was appointed Agent for the Commercial Union Assurance Company offering fire insurance.²³

Sadly, on 15 November 1898, Elizabeth Rankin lost her battle with illness after the second of two operations, aged just 33.²⁴ In the report of the funeral²⁵ it was noted that the funeral was widely attended including by many members of the Foresters, and there were many lovely wreaths, and letters of sympathy. 'The mournful procession reached from the residence of the deceased lady to the church at the top of the hill' and that the bell of St John's Church was 'striking in mournful accord'. Following the casket were 'the husband, hand in hand with his two dear little daughters Annie and Rita'. Unsurprisingly, James did not conduct the arrangements for this heartbreaking funeral.

After Elizabeth's death, James kept busy with his work and service to various

Camden organisations. He was in the A.H & I Society, Camden Progress Association, the committee of the Camden School of Arts, the Camden Volunteer Fire Brigade, amongst many other community roles.

In May 1899 he completed an examination at the Sydney Technical College to become a sanitary plumber and water fitter, adding plumbing and water supply to his already extensive building and contracting business.²⁶ He was the first to tap into the new water mains in October 1899.²⁷ He also continued to conduct funerals, build, and take on contract work.

In December 1899 it was reported that 'Mr J.D. Rankin, of Camden, is far from well, suffering from a severe attack of influenza, necessitating medical attention'.²⁸ However two weeks later he was reported to have completed eight water connections in one day.²⁹

James returned to council in early 1900, the *Camden News* announced in January 1900, that

*Mr. J. D. Rankin, an ex-alderman and ex-mayor of the municipality, has this morning finally decided to seek election. A hard working man with plenty of energy, and withal shrewd discretion and a knowledge of public matters, he will prove a most worthy representative.*³⁰

The ever-busy Rankin continued on with his many civic duties and his businesses, until an 'Accident to Alderman Rankin J.P. of Camden' was reported in April 1900:

*Yesterday (Wednesday) morning Alderman J. D. Rankin was called to attend an enquiry as to the death of the late Mr. Wedesweiler, of the Werombi district, who died suddenly on the day previously. Mr. Rankin was the acting coroner, (Mr. W. C. Furner J.P., the coroner being away on a holiday.) Mr. Rankin in his sulky accommodated the sergeant of police, Sergeant Parker; on the journey the horse shied at an obstacle on the road, throwing Mr. Rankin out. Sergeant Parker fortunately securing the horse before farther casualty. Mr. Rankin sustained a painful accident, fracturing the ribs, beyond a great shock to his system. Much local regret is expressed for the injured gentleman. On enquiry this morning we are informed that Mr. Rankin is progressing satisfactory.*³¹

A week later Mr J.D. Rankin was said to be much improved³² however he was noted as an apology at a St John's Church vestry meeting.³³ He missed other meetings including council through illness in May³⁴ and was said to be far from well though able to see his many callers.³⁵ In June he retired from the A.H & I Society committee,³⁶ and then he resigned from council by early

July.³⁷

Perhaps the accident had had a greater impact on the hard-working James than the newspapers indicate, as it appears that his businesses were now in financial trouble. James's assigned estate was put into the hands of trustees in late June.³⁸ A sale was conducted by R.H. Inglis in July, 'which occupied the better part of three days', 'Mr. Rankin personally submitting the lots offered'. It was announced 'that the estate would pay over 20s in the £'. There was also submitted

*the right of equity redemption of premises in Argyle-street, Camden, occupied by Mr. Rankin, including residence, out buildings, timber yard, blacksmith's shop, and Wilson's house. The property is one of the best positions in Camden, facing Argyle and John streets.*³⁹

It was purchased by George Furner.

J.D. Rankin placed a notice in the same paper thanking his many past customers for their support, and noting that he intended to continue business as a 'Builder, Undertaker, etc.' in Camden as in the past, with the same careful attention.⁴⁰ In August he took possession of 'the premises adjacent to Mr. Stevens, saddler of Argyle-street for his future operations'.⁴¹

James continued his contract building and undertaking work. He painted and decorated the exterior of the Crown Hotel in November⁴² and was granted £90 for his work on the new library for the Camden School of Arts in Decem-



**Camden Hospital Menangle Road, construction nearly complete, 1902.
(Camden Historical Society)**

ber 1900.⁴³

In January 1902⁴⁴ James remarried, to Eliza Milne in Campbelltown, though there is a lack of reporting of the wedding, indicating it was possibly a quiet ceremony, being James' second marriage, and Eliza being previously divorced.

Perhaps the most significant of the many projects built by J.D. Rankin was the first building of the Camden Cottage Hospital on Menangle Road. James had been attending meetings regarding the hospital proposal since 1898, and been on the committee and involved with the fundraising. In June 1901, 'Mr J.D. Rankin's tender for the new hospital buildings was accepted. The total amount of tender being £1802'.⁴⁵ In July 1901 it was announced that 'the

work will be commenced by the builder James Rankin forthwith'.⁴⁶ Work continued through into 1902, the new building said to be ready for occupation in March,⁴⁷ though further minor works including fencing appear to have delayed the opening.

In April 1902, James conducted the funeral of the first person, Herbert Peck, buried in Camden General Cemetery, having previously being of the trustees that established the cemetery. This was possibly the last of the many funerals conducted by J.D. Rankin.

It seems that soon after the hospital work was complete, James finally decided to retire from building and undertaker work, and seek a change of career and scenery, to take up the licence as publican at the Dapto Hotel. He listed the whole of his stock, furniture etc., for sale by auction with a note that everything must be sold without reserve, 'in consequence of his departure for Dapto'. This includ-

C A M D E N.
Carpenters, Painters, Householders,
And OTHERS.

Thursday, 8th May, 1902,
At 12.30 p.m.

**Important Sale Argyle St.,
by Auction, Camden.**

Under instructions from J. D. RANKIN, Esq., in consequence of
his departure for Dapto.

W. A. BRODERICK, Will sell by auction the
whole of his stock, furniture, etc., including:

MAGNIFICENT HEARSE, HORSES AND HARNESS, (the best out
of Sydney); Coffin Furniture, Wreaths, etc.

LARGE ASSORTMENT of Picture-frame Moulding, Linnenhangery
tools, 1st class Plasterers' Furnaces, Cramps, Pipe vice, Lodia
Rubber Hose, 3 Carpenters' Benches.

SPLENDID MORTISE MACHINE, and BORING MACHINE.
Large and small Grinding Stones, Floor Dags, Bench Cramps, Ladders,
Flag Pits, Timber, Iron Gouges, Burning off Lamp, Glass Cutting
Table and Block, 2 sets of Pipe die and Taps, complete set of
Bolt and Nut Dies, Augers, Sixteen Screw Jack, Block and Pulleys,
Pipes, Paints, Oils, Colors, etc., etc. etc.

(AND)

VICTOR PIANO, Large WARDROBES, Double and Single Beds,
Wickerwork Suits, Australian Suits, Mirrors, Marble top Wash
Basins, Dressing Tables, Chairs, Colver Richmond, 2 d. tables,
3 Venders and Grates, Cooking Range, Chest of Drawers, Garden
Seats, Scales, Manilla, Pictures, Bath, Office Stationery, etc.

KITCHEN FURNITURE, etc.
1st Class **BULKY AND HARNESS**, 1 Spring Dray, Tip Dray, Timber
Dray, pair of New Cast Wheels, large quantity of Harness,
Saddles, etc.

2 Blood Horses; 1 Blood Gelding.

All at account Mrs. GOODE:
1 Prince Arthur PHAETON, only used a few times.

The Auctioneer desires to mention that it is impossible to understate
everything, as it is an admitted fact that Mr. Rankin has the largest and
best assorted stock outside Sydney, therefore no one should miss this
sale, as
Everything must be sold without reserve. Inspection invited.
Full particulars from the Auctioneer.

W. A. Broderick, CAMDEN.

Camden News, 8 May 1902. (Trove, NLA)

ed his 'Magnificent hearse, horses and harness', drays, sulky, and horses, as well as his tools, machines, and household furniture including a piano.⁴⁸

On the day of the auction, May 8th, the friends of Mr. J.D. Rankin were requested to meet at the School of Arts, Monday next, at 8pm, to arrange for a send-off to that gentleman, prior to his leaving the district.⁴⁹

A week later, an extract from the May 1st *Camden News* was republished in a local Dapto newspaper:

*Mr. J. D. Rankin, builder and contractor of Camden, will shortly be leaving the district for Dapto. After so long a residence in Camden his absence will be keenly felt for he always and at all times took a deep interest in the welfare of the district and very much of his time had been devoted thereto. There is not a public institution locally but what he has been a working member of —elected unanimously on every occasion. Mr. Rankin's chief craftsmanship in our midst, amongst many buildings, is the permanent buildings of the Camden Cottage Hospital, which for thoroughness of construction has been accorded praise to that gentleman by the Board and its 'architect, Mr. Kent. Mr. Rankin is one of the past mayors of Camden and an alderman for many years. He resigned the position about two years ago. In the Camden A. H. and I. Society he was steward for many long years past, in the poultry section ; ever courteous and willing to oblige exhibitors, he will naturally be much missed. We wish him that success in the future that he may himself wish.*⁵⁰

Tragically, that wish for a successful future would never be fulfilled. After only a fortnight there, he suddenly collapsed and died at the hotel on Sunday the 18th of May. He was 41 years of age. An inquest found his death was caused by a damaged heart valve, possibly as the result of a previous attack of influenza which left his heart weak.⁵¹ Perhaps this was the attack reported in December 1899, or possibly there was some lasting impact from the fall he sustained in April 1900.

James Rankin's remains were brought back to Camden by special train from Dapto, and his funeral on May 21st was one of the largest seen in the district. The cortege started from the railway station and was headed by the Masonic and Foresters' Societies.⁵² The *Nepean Times* reports:

*The deceased was a resident of Camden for nearly 18 years, where he was a useful and popular citizen, always connected with any work for the benefit of the town. The remains were brought to Camden and buried in St John's Cemetery beside his late wife, and the esteem in which the deceased was held was shown by the numbers attending the funeral.*⁵³

After his death, his widow Eliza took up the licence of the Dapto Hotel, and married Ernest Campbell in 1907, continuing to care for James and Elizabeth's children, Annie and Rita Rankin.

Three days after J. D. Rankin's funeral, the Camden Cottage Hospital was officially opened. The *Camden News* reported that:

*It is the one cause of sadness in our gathering to-day that Mr. Rankin is not with us. His death occurred on Sunday last, with startling suddenness. Mr Rankin carried out his contract in the most satisfactory manner, and to the entire satisfaction of the architects and the committee. We mourn his loss, but this building will, I trust, remain as a substantial memorial of him.*⁵⁴

As you pass the old hospital building still standing on Menangle Road, take a moment to remember the remarkable J.D. Rankin and his many contributions to the community of Camden.



**Opening of Camden District Hospital by Sir John See, 24 May 1902.
(Camden Historical Society)**

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Dianne Matterson for her work on Argyle Street and her insights. The author also acknowledges the research of Dick Nixon in Camden Museum, and the newspaper resources of Trove.

Notes

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- 2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 Dec 1884 p3
- 3 Sydney Anglican Parish Registers - Ancestry
- 4 *NSW Govt Gazette* 8 June 1888 p4053
- 5 *Sydney Mail & NSW Advertiser* 10 Nov 1888 p1007
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- 7 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Apr 1891 p16
- 8 *Australian Town & Country Journal*, 17 Sep 1892 p16
- 9 *Daily Telegraph* 11 Feb 1893 p6
- 10 www.lodgecamden.org.au/our-history/
- 11 *Camden News* 13 Jun 1895 p5
- 12 *Camden News* 27 Jun 1895 p2
- 13 *Camden News* 17 Oct 1895 p1
- 14 *Camden News* 30 Jan 1896 p4
- 15 *Camden News* 9 Apr 1896 p6
- 16 *Camden News* 30 Apr 1896 p6
- 17 *Camden News* 7 May 1896 p1
- 18 *Camden News* 10 Dec 1896 p1
- 19 *Camden News* 20 Aug 1896 p4
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- 21 *Camden News* 24 Jun 1897 p1
- 22 *Camden News* 22 Jul 1897 p1
- 23 *Camden News* 24 Jun 1897 p5
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- 27 *Camden News* 5 Oct 1899 p4
- 28 *Camden News* 7 Dec 1899 p4
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- 30 *Camden News* 25 Jan 1900 p1
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- 32 *Camden News* 26 Apr 1900 p4
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- 34 *Camden News* 3 May 1900 p1
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- 36 *Camden News* 28 Jun 1900 p1
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- 48 *Camden News* 8 May 1902 p8

49 *Camden News* 8 May 1902 p5
50 *South Coast Times and Wollongong Argus* 17 May 1902 p11
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STATE FUNERALS.

J. D. RANKIN,

UNDERTAKER &c,

ARGYLE STREET, CAMDEN,

Artwork ‘Life Blood’ at The Australian Botanic Gardens

Susan Grant and Natalie Valiente

The Life Blood artwork is a vibrant and meaningful collaboration between three talented First Nations artists, Aunty Susan Grant, Natalie Valiente and Codie Leed Evans. It was recently unveiled at the National Herbarium of New South Wales at the Australian Botanic Garden Mount Annan, much to the delight of those in attendance.

The artists were inspired by the microscopic view of an eucalyptus leaf, which they saw as a symbol of the rivers and travelling tracks that were so important in Aboriginal culture.

With the help of the staff at the Herbarium, the Botanic Garden and the community, they spent an entire year developing their design. The result is a stunning piece that bridges the gap between modern science and the natural world, with its diverse flora and fauna, and the rich cultural heritage of the Aboriginal peoples.

Within the Botanic Garden at Mount Annan, a rare remaining part of the Cumberland Plain Woodland located on Dharawal Country, holds a special significance for many communities, including the Dharawal, Darug, and Gundungurra peoples. It was an important meeting place for generations, and continues to be a source of inspiration for the artists.

The meaning of Lifeblood, the artwork is the eucalyptus trees of the Cumberland Plain Woodland, without which the rest of its flora and therefore its fauna would not survive in any healthy way. And the eucalyptus trees are a big part our culture, which becomes our Lifeblood.

As they worked on their design, the artists held workshops and information sessions, giving members of the community the opportunity to learn more about their heritage and the land they call home. With the unveiling of the Life Blood artwork, their vision has become a reality, connecting the past, present, and future in a beautiful and meaningful way.

For the artists, the experience was nothing short of magical. As Aunty Susan Grant said, "We have a spiritual connection whenever we are in the botanical gardens, and this influences our design and artwork, connecting us back to the land." And with the Life Blood artwork now on display, that connection

will inspire generations to come.



Frederick Sharpe of ‘Camden View’

Kellee Cordina (Sharpe)

Frederick Allen Sharpe was born on 29th May 1925 at Nurse Taplin’s home in Oxley Street, Camden, the second child of Cecil Havelock Sharpe and Ivy Mildred Sharpe (nee Kelloway). Frederick has an older sister, Mavis, and younger sister, Doreen (deceased). After Fred’s birth, Nurse Taplin told his mother he had the nicest skin she had seen for a boy.



The Sharpe family farm (K Cordina)

The family lived at ‘Camden View’, a dairy farm on the outskirts of Camden. Fred’s parents purchased the property in the early 1920s. Originally it had been built by the Macarthur family. Fred’s father Cecil was employed at Camden Park before marrying and purchasing his own dairy farm, ‘Camden View’. At the time Cecil considered a number of nearby properties, however, decided on this home overlooking Camden, which so happened to be next door to the home of Ivy’s parents, Stephen and Prudence Kelloway.

When Fred was 4 weeks of age he had an extremely bad case of whooping cough. His mother struggled to manage his serious illness. His sister Mavis

was sent out on the farm with her father, whilst their mother cared for Fred. Thankfully, Fred recovered and thrived as he grew.

At the age of 4 years, Fred was tasked with walking Mavis the one and half miles from home to Mt Hunter Primary School each day. Fred was to sit there with Mavis all day until school was finished, then walk her back home.

Fred attended Sunday School at Cawdor Methodist Church. Accompanied by his sisters Mavis and Doreen, and their Kelloway cousins, the 2-mile walk was made on foot through the cold of winter and the heat of summer.

Fred completed primary school at Mt Hunter, then one year of high school in Camden. Not being academically inclined, he decided school was not for him. On leaving school, Fred commenced his first paid job at Whiteman's store on Argyle Street in Camden. Fred would rise early in the morning to help his father milk the cows, then ride his bicycle to Whiteman's store where he was tasked with delivering the groceries around town with a horse and cart. He worked Monday to Friday, and half a day on a Saturday, earning 3 pounds, 13 shillings and threepence per week.

As the only son of the family, it wasn't long before he was required fulltime on the farm. After 16 months working at Whiteman's store, Fred finished his employment to help his father run the dairy farm.

Showing dairy cattle also became a passion for Fred. In 1937, he entered his first Junior Farmers' Competition, walking his calf the 3 miles into Camden. This was something he continued to do for many years.

In his teens and early adult years, Fred's main form of transport was his bicycle. He would ride into Camden each Saturday night, and occasionally on a Wednesday, to meet his friends at 'the pictures'. In



Fred Sharpe pictured with his bicycle in the 1930s (K Cordina)



Fred's trophy received at the 1938 Camden Junior Farmers' Competition (K Cordina)



Fred Sharpe pictured with one of his Ayrshire cows in the early 1940s (K Cordina)

those days the pictures were held at the Paramount Cinema on Elizabeth Street. He recalls the cinema staff calling out as they walked around selling soft drinks, peanuts and sweets. He was most disappointed on one occasion, having left his bicycle parked out front with his friends' bikes, to come back and find it had been stolen. So, no more bike riding for Fred.

When World War II began, Fred recalls various changes around Camden. As a dairy farmer he was exempt from enlisting, so he remained working on the family farm. Camden Airport became home and training grounds for the RAAF, the British Royal Air Force, as well as a base and barracks for the US Army Air Corp. Fred recalls the Americans commenting "We have landed in some funny places, but never on a tennis court", which is how they referred to the landing strip at the Camden Airport.

At 18 years of age Fred was eligible to acquire his driver's licence. In those days the test was a fairly simple process. From the Camden Police Station, he was required to drive his father's car around the block with the Police Officer sitting alongside him. They left from John Street, with Fred signalling with his hand left, right and stop, then returned via Argyle Street and back to the Police Station. Fred passed his assessment and had successfully acquired his driver's licence. It is worth noting that Fred is still driving today. The year 2023 marks the 80th anniversary of Fred holding a driver's licence, and he can proudly state that in 80 years he has not received even one infringement



Fred and Betty's wedding in 1948 -L to R Frank Hutchinson, Lesley Jeffries, Doreen Sharpe, Fred Sharpe, Betty Sharpe, Cec Smart, Merle Southwell and Ralph Sidman (K Cordina)

notice or a demerit point.

In early 1948 Fred was invited by a friend to attend a service at Camden Methodist church. There he met and began courting Betty Southwell. Before long the couple were engaged with the wedding set for November 20th that year. Tragically, Betty's father, Edward Southwell, passed away unexpectedly on November 15th, mere days before the wedding date. Naturally Fred and Betty's wedding was postponed.

On Saturday, 11th December 1948, Fred and Betty were married at Camden Methodist Church. Clyde Dominish officiated and Rev. Whiteman assisted. Merle Southwell, Doreen Sharpe and Lesley Jeffries were bridesmaids. Cec Smart was best man, with Ralph Sidman and Frank Hutchinson as groomsmen.

From the time of Fred's birth to the present, he's lived on the same property. In addition to the main homestead, Fred and Betty built a second home on the hill to live in after their wedding.

Fred and Betty went on to raise four children there: Kenneth, their eldest son, who was born in 1950, Graeme born in 1954, followed by Robyn in 1955 and Margaret in 1964. Four generations of the Sharpe family remain living and working on the family property in 2023.

In the late 1940s, it was suggested Fred attend the annual Camden Show with his 'Invergowrie' stud Ayrshires. After declining the invite for a few years, in 1950 he took up the offer, entering his cattle for the first time. The Sharpe family proudly walked away with Champion Cow, Champion Heifer and Champion Pen Of Heifers. Other Ayrshire farmers Fred remembers competing at the time were Harold Moore, Vic Watson and Fred Smart. The Sharpe family were regulars at not only the Camden Show, but other shows, including the Sydney Royal, Campbelltown, Hawkesbury, Albion Park, Picton, Luddenham, Penrith, Berry, the Annual Calf Show at Hurlstone Agricultural College and even Dapto occasionally. Fred estimates receiving over 1000 ribbons during his show years, along with many trophies and prized items proudly displayed in his home.

Fred has seen immense changes to the dairy farm industry over the years in this region. In his younger days, milk was stored in milk cans which were left at the front gate of the property for collection. From there the milk cans were transported to the Camden Vale Milk Depot. Fred recalls one day noticing a car stopping at the front gate and stealing one of the farm's milk cans. Fred pursued in his ute and upon catching up to the driver kindly asked him to 'return the milk can'. Apparently, in those days milk can theft was quite common. On another occasion, police officers returned two Sharpe family milk cans, seized from a property near Liverpool.

In the 1960s, milk cans were phased out on the farm. In place of the cans, a large milk vat was installed in the dairy for storing the milk. Trucks would then come daily to transport the milk from the farm into the processing plant. In 1993, Fred downsized the farm's production, selling the majority of the 'Invergowrie' Ayrshire cows. With the Sharpe family's line of well-bred cattle and record milk production statistics, the 'Invergowrie' cattle sold for top price. A record was set with 'Dales Gold', a three-year-old in-milk heifer, purchased for \$17,000 by a dairy farm in Tasmania.

Fred milked his first cow when he was 4 years old and continued milking daily till 6 days shy of his 90th birthday. A very impressive amount of years and you can only imagine the number of cows milked over that 86 years! Up until the 1950s, Fred milked the cows purely by hand. In 1945, electricity was connected to the property, providing power to the dairy. In the late 1950s, milking machines were introduced, drastically changing the farm's daily milking process.

In 2023, Fred continues to live on the family farm. Sadly, it is one of the last remaining farms in the Camden district. Today, the farm is primarily used for beef cattle, on a small scale.

As Fred sits on his verandah looking towards Camden, he reflects on how the view has changed over the past 98 years - the number of cars travelling along the Burragorang Road increases daily, the sight of the traffic lights changing colour at the Cawdor Road intersection and the increasing number of night lights expanding each year further across the horizon.



Cecil Sharpe (Fred's father) sitting on a cow named Pansy at the Sharpe farm Bickley Vale (K Cordina)

The Life of Charles Davidson (David) Noble - Macaria Again

Lesley Robertson and Rick Noble

Over the years we have read many stories about Macaria at 37 John Street Camden. It was built in the 1860's for a boys grammar school, and later occupied by a medical practice, Camden Council offices and now the Alan Baker Art Gallery. What has not been mentioned is that for a time it housed a dental practice. David Noble was the dentist and what follows is an account of his life written by one of his daughters, Lesley Robertson and testimonies of two of his dental nurses, Gillian Finch (nee Palmer) and Betty Yewen. (BY & EL)

Betty Yewen, dental nurse, fondly recalls CD Noble:

My recollections of my dentist Mr David Noble as a young (teenager) patient at the time my father passed away (12th May 1954), was a meeting being held with my mother and Mr Noble who was making the offer to continue to do my and brothers Jim, Harry and sister Linda's dental treatment free of any charge. This offer continued for me for many years as it turned out.

I completed my education at Camden High School and Mr Noble had offered me a position as a dental nurse. He suggested a trial of a 3 months period to test if I was suitable and fitted into the team. The dental practice was located in the historic Macaria at 37 John Street,

CD Noble –his early life

David Noble was born in Lismore on 24th April 1923, the third of four children. His father, Harold Ewens Noble was a dentist in Lismore where David went to primary school. In 1934, Harold and his wife Emma (Emmie) decided to make the move to Sydney to give their children a better education. Harold sold his dental practice in Lismore, started a new practice in Macquarie St, Sydney and bought a house in Killara.

In 1936 David commenced high school at Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore). School records in his senior years show that he was a strong swimmer, a member of the rowing team, and a member of the Shore Rifley Brigade.

After school, David started a career in accountancy and, in 1941, was work-



Dental Nurse Betty Yewen with her sister Linda taken at family home Hume highway Narellan (1950s) (B Yewen)

at Milne Bay and Lae. In 1944 the battalion was stationed on the Atherton Tablelands and David underwent signals training. In 1945 he was promoted to sergeant, his unit left for Morotai Island and he saw action at Balikpapan, Borneo.

While in the army David's father, Harold, aged 54, died in 1943 while he was stationed in New Guinea. He was refused leave to return home. David's older brother, John, a member of the Australian Army Dental Corps was granted leave to return home to tend to his father's affairs, and subsequently moved into his father's dental practice in Macquarie St, Sydney.

After returning home from New Guinea in 1943 David was admitted to military hospitals in Cairns and Brisbane for various infectious diseases, which

ing at Flack and Flack Chartered Accountants when Japan entered the Second World War, Aged 18, David was keen to join the Royal Australian Air Force, but was rejected because of his colour blindness.

In the army

David's second choice was the army and he enlisted in January 1942. He was transferred to the 2nd Australian Corps Troops Supply Unit for training. David was a good student and in May of that year, he was sent for further training as a student in communications attached to the army school and later transferred to the AIF (Australian Imperial Force) as a corporal.

Over the next twelve months David trained with the army cipher section at Townsville. In 1943 his infantry battalion saw action

effected his immune system and dogged him in later life. David also suffered recurring pain from a serious army vehicle accident in 1944, when two fellow soldiers were killed, while training on the Atherton Tablelands.

For David, the war was an extremely stressful period. After nearly five years in the army, two overseas postings, fierce combat, and the loss of friends, he was desperate to return home to his family and to start a new life. His war experience left him with what is now called post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD).

After the war

When David returned to civilian life at the end of June 1946, he gained employment as a life assurance salesman in Sydney. At the same time, he applied to the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme (CRTS) for university training in the field of dentistry.

David was granted access to study a four-year fulltime Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) at Sydney University, commencing first term 1947.

Shortly after his lectures began David married Lorne Adams at Shore Chapel in North Sydney when David was 23 and Lorne was 21. Lorne's two sisters, Evelyn and Robin were her bridesmaids, and David's groomsmen were his brother, Alec, and a friend, Bruce Read.

David and Lorne were very well suited. He met Adye Lorne (Lorne) Adams at a dance while he was training at the Narellan Military Camp near Camden in 1942. Lorne lived in Camden and although they were both teenagers, they stayed in touch while David was in the army.

David and Lorne spent their honeymoon at Hotel Kosciusko in Perisher skiing. With the honeymoon over, they started married life in a rented house in Cremorne. David received a small allowance from CRTS while studying full-time, however it wasn't sufficient to provide for a wife and subsequent children. So, for the duration of his degree, David drove a taxi choosing the late-night shift so he could attend his lectures during the day.

Their first daughter, Lesley Anne arrived in 1949, followed twenty months later by a second daughter, Barbara Jane in 1950. David completed his university degree and graduated with a BDS in 1951.

Life in Camden

David's first job as a dentist in 1951 was as assistant to Charles Stone, BDS,



Dental Nurses L.R Betty Yewen, Gillian Palmer, Mary Thomas taken celebrating Gillian's 21st birthday function. (B Yewen)

in Crown St, Wollongong. However, he only stayed there for a short time before moving to Camden, to setup his own practice there. This was a good move, as they were able to move into Lorne's family home, 'Grays', in River Road, Elderslie and they were immediately welcomed by Lorne's family and friends.

David chose the historic Macaria building in John St, Camden to set up his practice and had been converted into a small medical hub, where several doctors already had consulting rooms. David had to borrow money to set up his practice, however his reputation as a gentle and caring dentist quickly spread and within months, he had established a loyal clientele.

Life in Camden was perfect. David and Lorne came from close, loving families, they valued the importance of education, they had many loyal friends, and they were compassionate about helping others in their community.

David had a very sharp mind, was a wonderful storyteller and had a great sense of humour. Similarly, Lorne was clever, artistic, a caring mother and a loyal friend. The two of them gathered many close friends in Camden and each year attended lots of balls, dinner parties, tennis matches, fancy-dress parties and live theatre. David was a great dancer and a popular dance part-

ner and loved listening to jazz and swing and big bands. His favourite musicians were Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, Louis Armstrong, and the Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller bands.

David's first love was always family. He and Lorne had two more children while they lived in Camden, Diana Lorne, on 6th December 1955 and their only son, Richard John, on 31st July 1963. After three daughters, a little boy was both a surprise and a joy to the family. David loved celebrations, particularly birthdays and Christmas, and he delighted in choosing his own presents for Lorne and the children, which were always generous. Christmas dinner was traditional, with lots of trimmings, and it was usually his job to make the hard sauce for the plum pudding where several silver threepences and sixpences were always hiding.

A few stray dogs joined their Camden family and David, who had a soft spot for animals, was the first to accept and care for them. When a young female dog, Sparky, arrived frightened and pregnant, David set up a birthing area for her in the laundry and stayed up all night to help deliver the puppies. A second dog, Stan, arrived a year later, starving and mistreated with a nasty eye infection and David lovingly nursed him back to health. Both dogs became loyal and trusting pets, and remarkably, didn't chase the many chickens which also shared the front yard.

David was very involved in his children's education and showed great delight in their achievements, however small. He took a special interest in the subjects they chose at school and was particularly proud that Lesley and Barbara won teachers college scholarships to Sydney University. Had he lived longer, he would have been equally proud of Di and Rick, who both won scholarships to attend Sydney University.

David and Lorne's extended families were very important. Lorne's two sisters and parents lived nearby, so their families spent lots of time together and all the cousins were close. David's family were a bit further away. His mother, Emmie, sister, Ruth, and brother, John, all lived in Sydney, and his brother Alec, lived in Tamworth. So, several times a year, David and Lorne would pack up the family and go on a road trip to see them and usually stayed a few days.

David was particularly close to his mother, Emmie. When Emmie started to become forgetful, he and his siblings decided they would take it in turns to care for her in their homes, for three months at a time. Emmie joined her Camden family in 1956. She was in her early 70's, a soft, loving grandmother and the children loved her. She died in care a year later.

David was also close to his mother-in-law, Joyce Adams. Joyce was living in Campbelltown when she became a widow in her late 60's. She wasn't happy living alone, so David and Lorne asked her to join them in River Road. Joyce had her own kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living area, and mostly lived independently, with daily visits to the rest of the house. She remained with the family for seven years and contributed so many positives to their lives. She adored her four grandchildren and shared with them her great love of literature and classical music. Lorne once joked that she thought her mother was fonder of David and the children than her!

David's second love was sport, particularly sailing, swimming, body surfing, skiing, fishing, tennis, cricket and golf. Every summer he would pack up his family and take them to Austinmer for a two-week beach holiday. It was at Austinmer that he would religiously take his children to the ocean pool early each morning, to teach them to swim, and their love of swimming continued into later life. David loved to body surf at Austinmer and the five-day commentary of the Boxing Day cricket test on his transistor radio was never far away.

His third love was his connection to his community, both local and professional. He became Secretary of the Camden RSL and always attended the dawn service on Anzac Day. He was an active member of the Apex Club of Camden and from 1958 to 1959 was Apex District Governor. He was also a member of the Camden Bowling Club and one year, to raise money for the Camden Show Society, he entered himself in the 'Mystery Man' competition. He dressed as a tramp, with a stone in his shoe to affect a limp, and even his children did not recognise him. The only person to guess the mystery man was one of his dental nurses, who recognised his clean fingernails'.

David was a generous community dentist, never turning away a patient in pain, even though he knew that some would be unable to pay. And he regularly donated his services to the Mater Dei Orphanage in Narellan, which was run by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. David enjoyed his regular visits there and became very fond of the Sisters and his 'special' patients.

David believed strongly in the importance of dental education and was an active member of Australian Dental Association from 1951, joined the federal council in 1955 and served as treasurer, and a foundation member of the Dental Health Education and Research Foundation.

Health Problems

Although a very active man, David suffered several bouts of ill-health during his time in Camden and most of these were attributed to his time in the army.

Continued ill health forced David to sell his busy Camden practice in the Macaria building, and to keep a smaller portion of his practice in Patrick St Campbelltown.

In 1965, a training camp for army recruits conscripted by the National Service Training Scheme was set up at Ingleburn Army Camp. David applied to the Department of the Army for a job as a civilian dentist there and when selected, sold his dental practice in Campbelltown. He commenced work at Ingleburn Army Camp in mid-1965 with the officer rank of Major and felt he had now turned a full circle.

David's health improved considerably when he was no longer running his own practice. He loved the new army recruits and they thought highly of him. And his new life as a civilian officer at Ingleburn meant that he could spend more time with his family than ever before. In 1968, when conscription started to wind down, he gained a second job as a part-time dentist with Dr L Roth BDS in Villawood, to further supplement his income.

In 1969 David died in his sleep. He was only 45. David's small plaque rests in the grounds at St Paul's Church, Cobbitty, along with a similar brass plaque for Lorne, who lived till she was 85. They are both greatly missed.

Dental nurse, Gillian Finch (nee Palmer)

I lived in Alpha Road at the time and began working for David Noble as a casual on Saturday mornings in 1953. I was still at school. After finishing school, in 1954, I became full time and remained at the surgery for five years. I then moved to Sydney as a Dental Nurse to the President of the Australian Dental Association.

While working for David, I marvelled at the kindness he showed to people who came to him in pain, not always charging them for his service.

I also noted that there was a small flat behind the surgery which was rented to an English couple, Mr and Mrs Stephenson who moved to Katoomba in 1958.

Dental nurse, Betty Yewen, more memories

Mr Noble took over the care of Betty's much needed dental treatment, that also gave him hands-on practice with gold inlay work. I was, so to speak, to become his long term guinea pig with many M.O.D.'s required (Mesial Occlusal Distal fillings. These go across the top of a tooth, including both the front and the back). In those years there was no fluoride in the water systems.



Source: Newspaper clipping, *Camden News* c1959) (Betty Yewen)

The end result, I had a mouth full of gold successfully lasting for years. This was another treatment along with numerous others that Mr Noble very sadly never lived to see the results. His generosity extended further into the community. Another, I remember, were the block bookings that we made for the special needs children from the Mater Dei. These arrangements happened frequently and over many years. I recall the front room being used when an outside doctor was required to anesthetize for difficult treatment and patients. A great benefit for Mr Noble and staff were the beautiful homemade honey sponges, jams, and other treats supplied by the wonderful dedicated sisters that cared for and

transported the girls.

I vividly remember the first daily duty of my working day as the junior. It was my job to clean the brass plate on the front entry gate, this was carried out with much elbow grease, a tin of Brasso and polishing cloth. That brass plate was meant to shine! The entry area was given a clean sweep with a straw broom. The entry gate was positioned in the thick hedge that went the full length of 'Macaria'. Another of my early duties was to do the banking. This meant walking trips to the Commonwealth Bank situated on the corner of John and Argyle streets.

I also recall a 'ditty' my father helped me compose during Health Week in Primary School -

*'I went to the dentist today to have two teeth pulled away.
Open up wide while I look inside and just sit still while I use the drill.
I've done a good job as can be seen, so it's up to you to keep them
clean'*

Mr Noble's dental team was Gillian Finch (Palmer), receptionist and assistant and Mary Eagles (Thomas) who had been the chair-side assistant before moving into a very self-taught as well as trained by Mr Noble, as the dental me-

chanic. Mary was responsible for denture making and endless early unique designed orthodontic appliances. Mr Noble, I believe, had a gift in correcting and straitening crooked teeth with early extractions, fitting simply-made bite plates, along with chin caps designed and made by Mary. These treatments were carried out at a time long before orthodontists.

There were two dental practices in Camden. The second was Mr Merv Lloyd who operated his practice in a lovely Cottage at number 175 Argyle Street. In my dental nurse career I was employed part-time with both dentists, Mr Noble and Mr Lloyd. In 1964 working for Mr Lloyd (I was 7 months pregnant) I was told by my boss "there is not enough room for the 'three' of us to work comfortably beside the chair!" How blessed was I to have experienced working for two wonderful bosses and to share so many great memories.

A brief history of the life of Charles Davidson (David) Noble (extract from a private monologue written by Lesley Robertson and Rick Noble. This story extract has been edited for length and clarity by Betty Yewen, Evan Lephed and Ian Willis

Photo Essay– Cowell's Camellia Nursery





