

## **ANDREW ALLEN'S ORAL INTERVIEW WITH GEOFF EVES ON 24 JULY 2013**

**AA** Geoff, were you born in Campbelltown?

**GE** No, I was born in Auburn. I didn't come to Campbelltown until 1949 to work for a man Harold Ainsworth.

He had a studio in Liverpool and a darkroom in Campbelltown. I had worked for a few photographers before I came to Campbelltown. I saw an advertisement in the paper that he wanted someone to come and work for him in Campbelltown. So I came here in 1949. I did all his darkroom work as well as his weddings in Liverpool and in Campbelltown. We didn't have a studio here in those days. We used to do the wedding photography in somebody's home, in the lounge room or something like that. We were pretty primitive. I worked for him for a couple of years and then upstairs of a building became available. He set the studio up in a simple sort of way.

I left him then and he left Campbelltown all together and I started up the studio in Campbelltown. There wasn't a lot of work and we had a bit of a struggle in the first couple of years. My wife went to work as well, not with me. Then she left work and came and joined me and we both worked in the studio until around 1978.

**AA** So your family wasn't associated with Macquarie Cinema? Was that a different family?

**GE** No, that was a different Eves altogether.

**AA** When did you first start taking photographs?

**GE** When I was about 14. My camera was the simplest possible camera that you could buy then, it cost me about 7/6d or 75 cents. I used to buy a film a week and I used to whiz them off to the processors to get printed. I had a part time job at the chemist shop and I could send the films off pretty quick. I was in the army during the war. When I came out of the army I went to work for a commercial photographer in Broadway. It was some sort of scheme where they partly paid my wages. He was a very good commercial photographer and I worked with him and the rest I just picked up as I went. I read heaps of books, I have thousands at home.

**AA** Did you win any prizes with your photography?

**GE** Oh yes, that trees photo there was a 1<sup>st</sup> prize one. I've got a couple of them. I used to belong for a while to the YMCA, not that I was in the YMCA, photographic mob and I've got a cup at home for their best photographer.

**AA** Did you have a favourite subject to take?

**GE** Yes I did. The photography that I enjoyed the best was photographing women to make them look their best. I felt absolutely at home doing that. We used to do a bit of fashion photography, not a lot, but a bit of fashion photography. I just felt right doing it. I liked all photography really; the only thing that I didn't like was too much of the candid flash bang sort of stuff.

**5 mins**

**AA** What about Campbelltown. Did you have a favourite photograph that you took of Campbelltown?

**GE** The best picture that I ever took in Campbelltown was those trees apart from the people. Not really, but there were a couple of photos that I took from a ferris wheel in the park, I don't know if you have seen them. It was a really big ferris wheel at the entrance to Mawson Park looking straight down. I've got those at home; I really like those pictures, but no favourites really.

**AA** Do you still take many photographs?

**GE** I do, but of course it is an electronic age now and to be quite truthful I feel a little bit strange with it. With the old type of photography, if there was a problem I really had absolute confidence I could fix it. I knew how to fix it and there were no problems, I knew exactly how to go about it. People would come in sometimes and ask me if they had problems of some sort. I knew how to fix it. I've got a good camera now; it has a booklet that goes with it of 400 pages of how to use it. I tell you it is a strain. I still use it; I have some quite good pictures at home. I don't do it to the same extent; I don't get the opportunities now, mainly because I've got a pretty sick wife which takes all my time, but I still take a few now and then. I took one last year which I absolutely love. We have a jacaranda tree out the front and the whole complete front was covered with blossoms which was absolutely beautiful.

I remember once I went out to Appin to do a job. On the way home there used to be a very old house, I don't know what it was called and the front gate onto Appin Road was broken down and there were a whole lot of milk cans beside the gate. I pulled up and spent 5 or 10 minutes at the customer's expense and took a couple of pictures, they are very nice pictures. The occasion used to arise more often in those days. If you go out somewhere these days and I take my camera with me and I have someone with me, they don't want to wait while I fiddle about taking my pictures. They want to get on with their day. But if you are out on a job and you see something else, you've got the time to just

take 5 or 10 minutes off to take the pictures. You've got the film there and you're ready to go. That's where professional photographers have got it over the amateur. You know professional photographer, those two words shouldn't go together because what professionalism to me means really is that you are earning your living through photography. It doesn't mean to say that you are any better than an amateur really. The professionals have the opportunities to take good pictures. They don't always though. There are some pretty poor professionals around. They only call themselves professionals because they make a living out of it. Once you start taking money for it, you are a professional.

## **10 mins**

**AA** As I said to you, we have a lot of your photographs on our photo data base. They are good and also valuable because for instance the ones of the main street in Campbelltown, you can see the changes in the street. It is really good that you have done that from an historical point of view.

**GE** I've also got copies of very old photographs taken in the 1800s of Campbelltown. You have probably seen those. When it used to be the Fishers Ghost Restaurant, they brought me some negatives and asked me to do some prints for their walls, which I did. I did copies for myself whilst I was about it. I've got about 3 or 4 of those at home.

There used to be a fellow called Kit Goninan who was a very good artist who lived in Campbelltown. When the Balalaika café was in Campbelltown, they had pictures on the wall, the story of Fishers Ghost. I took those. You've probably seen most of the pictures that I have taken of Queen Street. I sat down one day and I thought I'll write down a rough map of Queen Street and I will put in every single business and building from Lack's Hotel up to the Good Intent Hotel, which I did. I wrote in every business and how big they were and I still have that. It's very interesting.

**AA** Did you photograph them as well? Did you write them down and take photographs of each building?

**GE** Oh no, there were far too many, about 100 of them. I just made a little drawing, so that I would know in years to come what shops etc. used to be there. It certainly has changed. How long have you been in Campbelltown?

**AA** Not long, I've only been living in Campbelltown about 9 years.

**GE** The building I was in, the darkroom is still there. It's just up from Dumaresq Street. On the corner was Tripp's Garage on one corner and Pope's Garage on the other, across the road there was a Bakery on one corner and on the other there was a house and next to the house was McQueen's Café and the darkroom was above there. But my studio adjoined Lack's Hotel opposite

Mawson Park. There was the Fire Brigade and then there was Mulhollands Balalaika Cafe next and then there was a bootmaker and a fish shop and then a Chemist and Alice Gee's frock salon. There was a stairway between the last two shops and we were up the stairway over the top. The building has gone now.

**AA** It's a shame. All those buildings from Railway Street, Cordeaux Street all the way down to Dumaresq Street have all changed.

**GE** You wouldn't recognise it now. The building with the darkroom over McQueens is still there, I think it might be the cake shop now. We had just under 30 years in Queen Street, which was a fair while.

We were the only photographers then and we got all the work. We used to go all around, down as far as Picton. Say for instance a Solicitor from Sydney wanted a picture of an accident spot, rather than send out a photographer from Sydney they would get me to go down. We used to do a fair bit of work for Solicitors. If somebody was involved in an accident and say they had a lot of stitches in their face or something, they would get me to take pictures before it was completely healed and they would use them in their claim for compensation. So we had all types of work to do. We didn't have too many nudes to do.