

Ron and Ailsa Simpson

ANDREW ALLEN'S INTERVIEW WITH

RON AND AILSA SIMPSON ON 7th DECEMBER 2020

AA I'm doing an oral history interview, today is the 7th December, 2020, at HJ Daley Library, my name's Andrew Allen, I'm the Local Studies Librarian, today I'm interviewing Ron and Ailsa Simpson. So Ron, we'll start with you if you like, can you tell me where you were born please?

RS Yes, I was born at Bexley, which is a suburb of Sydney, on the 28th May 1933.

AA And Ailsa, where were you born?

AS I was born in Bega on the South Coast.

AA That's my home town!

AS Oh really! I was born on the 12th August 1936, my father was a teacher down there, and both lots of my grandparents lived down there at that stage. One of them was a teacher, Carson was their name and the other one was a dentist in Bega for years and years and years.

AA What was his name can I ask you?

AS Fisher. Some of the family are still there, but my parents were the eldest of both families so there was my sister and I, and there was some gaps in the family, because, well, my Mum and Dad moved to Sydney in 1939, the recession didn't just happen in 1930 apparently, I remember none of this of course, but there was still no money in 1939 and there was only employment for teachers part time, and so my father and mother moved up to Sydney and settled in the St George district.

AA Right.

AS And he taught at Brighton school for about 9 years after that, but most of my family came from the South Coast.

AA Right. So what was your maiden name?

AS Carson.

AA Oh, Carson, that's right.

AS Yes, my grandfather actually taught at Jellat Jellat and not long ago, this has got nothing to do with Campbelltown, just before my Dad died, which was in 2003, and he was 90 then, he'd had a letter from a Historical Society or something at Bega, and it must have been some sort of an anniversary, because when my grandfather was teaching there Kingsford Smith landed in a plane on the fields around Jellat Jellat

AA It always floods at Jellat Jellat.

AS Did it?

AA Yeah, it still does flood.

AS Well we only went down there for school holidays and things.

AA Yeah, so you were born in the Bega hospital then were you?

AS Yes, I think it's Mark III now, but I was born in the original one I think!

AA Yeah, yeah it is Mark III, I was born in III! But it's not about me so I'll ask you the questions! So what year were you born?

AS 1936.

AA 1936, okay. So Ron, your family, how many were there in your family? Did you have a big family?

RS No, we had a small family. Different from our family, we had 6 children, 5 boys and a daughter to finish up with, but I only had one brother, he's also an engineer, 3 years younger than me, and Ailsa only had one sister, so we went away from the normal pattern with the 6 children.

AA So the house that you lived in at Bexley, so you were born in Bexley.

RS Born in Bexley in a hospital near Carlton and we lived in Northbrook Street Bexley, and Ailsa, when she came up from Bega lived two streets down.

AS The families didn't know one another.

RS The house is still there, Mum, other than a few months in the Calvary hospital at Kogarah, lived in the house all her life.

AS After she was married.

RS After she was married, yes. Both my parents were English,

AS Both born in Britain

RS Yes, Dad came out when he was 12, Mum came out when she was 8. An interesting part of her early life was that they settled in a home at Newnes. They were mining kerosene there, mining shale for kerosene.

AA So where's Newnes?

AS It's on the way to the Lithgow area. Around Lithgow.

5 minutes

AS It's where the exclusive hotel that's run by one of the Arab countries is, that's about \$1500 a night!

RS They had a very, not primitive, that's not the word, but the house that they lived in initially had a dirt floor, and split bark walls which would have been..

AS Wattle and daub I think.

RS Yes, lined with paper.

AS It would have been freezing.

- AA** So that would have been a bit of a culture shock I guess, coming from where they came.
- RS** It would have been very different, yes, because they would have had normal middle class or lower class upbringing in England at that stage.
- AS** I don't think there would have been a great difference actually, because in the 1880s a lot of the houses in Britain didn't even have bathrooms, did they.
- RS** Dad's parents came out to Shepparton and established an orchard there and when my Dad was married about 28, and he virtually left Shepparton having worked for his parents with no money and studied to be a motor mechanic working for the NRMA. He was there pretty well most of his working life.
- AA** Do you remember much about your childhood, like did you have happy childhoods?
- RS** My childhood was very happy, just the two of us, we lived in this home at Bexley which was a nice Federation type home of course by today's standard, I was encouraged to do all sorts of things in life that I wanted to do, yes they were very happy years for me. I look back on them now with very, very fond memories. A little bit regretful that both my parents died when they were 74, and it was sort of an anxious year for me when 74 came up, I was glad to get past it,
- AA** I can see why, yeah. And you had a good childhood too Ailsa?
- AS** My parents were far sterner than Ron's. They believed children should be seen and not heard, and I think they, although as children, in a way we were much freer than children are today. We were allowed to go out and play, we could even play cricket on the street outside the house, there were occasional cars and of course you got off the road, but there weren't cars whizzing down all the time. In any case cars only really came back after the Second World War, what, in the 50s didn't they? Because I don't think you could get fuel. My grandfather who taught at Gerringong at that stage had a car, but it must have been different for country people. I don't know, children weren't told the same sort of things, and weren't encouraged to be as outgoing as they are now, and consequently we now reach the stage where our children and the adults can stand up and speak confidently and converse, and have good knowledge and all of this, it makes a tremendous difference. But my Dad was very fond of reading, he was a very intelligent man...
- RS** Very fond of boys rather than girls
- AS** ...and had a house half full of books.
- RS** Ailsa just has the one sister.
- AA** So even though he was strict did you have a good relationship with him?
- AS** I didn't have a bad relationship with him, but I only realised, we have a granddaughter and a grandson from different members of the family who are actually on the spectrum and our daughter is a social worker, and it's only in the last, oh, probably five years that I've realised that my father was on the spectrum also. It's amazing the things that have happened over the years, there were obviously all these people around but these things weren't diagnosed until really quite recently.
- RS** Very clever fellow, very clever.

AA So what sort of things did you get up to in the street, so you played a bit of cricket did you at Bexley? Did you have neighbouring kids that you played with?

10 minutes

AS Ah yes, there were people who lived locally and we played with the other children, a thing that's different, we're quite friendly with our neighbours but I couldn't tell you the names of the people across the street. We're on good terms with everyone but it isn't the same sort of relationship. I guess there might have been a bit more of a community feeling during the Second World War, which I only really remember the end of. Children all went to school, but there were air raid shelters dug in the vacant block across the road from the school at Carlton which I attended and I remember being marched over there with the rest of the children, we had to have a bag – do you remember what they were called Ron?

RS I don't remember what the name of the bag was but I know they contained a piece of rubber which if the air raid came you were supposed to bite on it to prevent ?? damage, barley sugar, I think there might have been a bandage and some sticking plaster or something. It's a long time ago. I don't seriously think if there had been an air raid there would have been much shelter in a trench in the ground but anyway.

AA I remember it much more clearly than Ailsa does, because I'm three years older, and I remember the school that I went to at Carlton where they regularly had the map up on the board with the arrows on it like you used to see in the newspapers today, pointing where the enemy were, I remember that very clearly, I remember our house had the strips of paper or muslin glued onto the windows so that if there the bombs dropped the windows wouldn't shatter. I remember Dad digging a trench out the back yard that would have been about the size of a grave but much deeper, which was covered over. I remember when war was declared that Mum was upset, because we heard the news on the radio, those sorts of things are very vivid in my memory, but the same incidents are not in yours are they?

AS No. My Dad kept working as a teacher during the Second World War, I do remember him going off, I don't know how often, with a case, into town at night because he was a member of the NES which I presume was the National Emergency Service and so they must have had to do a stint – I couldn't tell you how long it was, because there was that bombing in Sydney Harbour wasn't there. I do remember the submarine nets across the harbour, you know. Is it near Middle Harbour or something? It must have been after, oh no wait a minute, I think those nets were there all the time, I think I've read that, I wouldn't have known that at the time, I think those mini-sub's somehow got through the net, didn't they, or at least one of them did. And that was only the thing that I briefly remember. My uncles were all involved in the war, and I vaguely remember when my father's next brother down, he had three brothers, came back from Changi, and of course I didn't remember him at all, because I presume he would have left when I was about three or four so I had really no memory of him before that, and happily, he came back, trained as a teacher and had a lovely family of his own.

RS My Dad was in a protected industry, as a motor mechanic, and his service as a mechanic was to work on the military vehicles and so he wasn't called up for war and didn't volunteer either, but that was, I guess, his contribution. In our house Mum and Dad had opened their house for people on the street, and they used to have card evenings to raise money for the war effort. I remember that very clearly. I'm not sure where we slept but I think we probably had a spot on the floor of the house that we were going at, but yes that's the sort of stuff I remember.

AA Was there a feeling, even though you were children, was there a fear, did you fear what was happening, were you concerned?

15 mins

RS No, I honestly didn't have any fear. I think that's a blessing as children that...did you have any fear at all?

AS No, no, although strangely, because there were newsreel theatres at that time and whilst movies as they call them now were censored in a different form, some of the newsreels that came back from the war, I wouldn't have been very keen on my children seeing piles of bodies, and teeth being taken out of dead bodies..

RS for the gold...

AS and all this horrible stuff in the concentration camps. And there were lots of war films weren't there.

RS I've been more anxious about, as a young person, about the atrocities in the concentration camps, and the penalties that the Jews paid and stuff like that. Never so much as a child it wasn't a big part of my life or my education at all either. No, no.

AS I think that mainly came out after the war was finished really.

AA Yeah, yeah, I think you're right, yeah.

RS Are we going into too much detail?

AA No, that's fine, it's good actually. I'm enjoying it, definitely not. So you lived close to each other, so how did you meet then? When did you meet and how did you meet?

RS (Laughter) I'll start off and you can finish it! Add stuff if you need to! We both attended the Methodist Church at Bexley, and I mentioned earlier we lived two streets apart and both attended the church. Ailsa was sixteen when I started to take notice of her, I was nineteen, and we started to go out, and within six months of our courtship I think we both realised we wanted to spend our life together, and of course I didn't have very much money at that stage, and the only restriction Ailsa's Dad put on is you've got to have a house to go to, you know (laughing) and I was able to achieve that so...

AS Yes, but not straight away!

RS I worked for Sutherland Council as a Cadet Engineer and the opportunity came to buy a block of land at Heathcote, which I purchased,

AS And paid cash for!!

AA Wow!

RS Yes, 225 pound it cost. We just had to wait three years for me to be 22, and Ailsa to be just 19 when we got married.

AA So what year would that be? What year did you get married?

RS Ah, 1955. You add on from there.

AA 65 years. That's tremendous. Fantastic.

RS You're recollection of that? (asking Ailsa)

AS Yes, three of our children were born after we came to Campbelltown and two of our sons were born in Leeton. Ron worked at Bankstown Council when our eldest son was born and it was a long way from Heathcote to Bankstown, it was sort of two sides of the triangle on the train to get there, and he was a cadet engineer at that stage and he earned 10 pound a week, so things were pretty tight! (laughing)

AA It's hard to imagine.

AS It is!

RS We were just barely on the basic wage when we got married.

AS I thought it was below the basic wage?

RS Not when we were married it wasn't. We realised when our first son started to arrive soon after we were married that I had to do something to get the income up and we decided to have a move to Leeton. Three or four jumps on the engineering step ladder, and really Andrew I don't think we ever really seriously looked back from that point.

AA So how long were you at Leeton then, you wouldn't have been there for very long..

RS Two years.

AA Two years.

RS Two years at Leeton, one year at Crookwell and then came to Campbelltown as a Senior Engineer with a couple of subjects to do to qualify as a Council Civil Engineer, and was promoted to Deputy Engineer when I qualified as an Engineer, under, Harley Daley was the Town Clerk. Jim Waugh was the Engineer.

AA So did you know Harley very well?

20 min

RS Yes, I worked with him when the engineer was doing courses or attending conferences, Harley and I got to know one another quite well. He introduced me to drinking! (laughing). I was almost wholly a teetotaler until then.

AS Having been brought up in the Methodist Church!

RS He brought me downhill! (laughter)

AS They were very generous to us, weren't they? They looked for a block, they suggested a few blocks of land because it was more awkward with us still living in Crookwell, because at that stage we had three children, the eldest of which was about 4 I think, Trevor started school the year after we came here and he was our eldest son, and we lived in this old house which had been Percy, what's his other name?

RS Marlow, Percy Marlow.

AA Oh, in Cordeaux Street?

AS No, it was beside the Courthouse. It was across the road nearly, well it was across the road really from one edge of Mawson Park.

AA Okay.

RS Opposite what was the picture show.

AS There was a well in the garden with an old fashioned pump, it must have been a timber house, it had an outhouse that had the laundry, we'd only acquired a washing machine after our third son was born, and of course the washing machine went out to the laundry, and it was used once, because it was a Bendix, and it spun the clothes, and when it spun the whole laundry rocked. That was the end of that, then it was the copper!

AA So it was halfway between the courthouse and the library? The old library?

AS Well the old library, that library was built after we were there.

AA Yeah of course

AS What was the library when we came to Campbelltown was, I don't think it was quite on the corner of Lithgow Street, I think it was one, whatever was on the corner, and I can't remember,

AA Yeah, there was a School of Arts there on the corner of Lithgow and Queen

AS Well it was part of that, and the gentleman who ran the library, and the library was that wooden building that's in Hurley Park,

AA Right

AS I think it's still there isn't it, just up from what was the reservoir that was built.

RS I don't remember that

AS Well that's where they moved that, to the park later on. Perhaps it had been the old RSL, but if it was it was before we came there, the gentleman who ran it, whose name I don't have any memory of, was a lovely guy. The library was all paperbacks, there weren't many at all, there can't have been children's books because we used to take our children into the Liverpool Library. On the old Campbelltown Road of course, with all the milestones still in place, the old stone ones. When we came to Campbelltown, because both our parents still lived in Bexley, it wasn't until one night we'd come home from visiting them that we realised there was a road that went into Ingleburn (laughing) because there weren't all those houses in between, there were paddocks and we could see the lights, and so we knew there had to be a road.

AA So where Pembroke Road is now

AS Yes, oh Pembroke Road was there but the old road went through the Army Camp of course.

RS The council were very good to us.

AS They were, they were.

RA Harley, as Ailsa mentioned, looked up three or four blocks of land that he thought would suit us, because we told him we'd like to have a block with a view over the mountains, and he was able to achieve that for us, and not many Town Clerks would go to the trouble, I wasn't a junior engineer but certainly wasn't a senior engineer at that stage, and take them around to the

blocks himself, and show them the blocks and the Council, as Ailsa said, made this old house available to us as a stopgap while we built our own home up in Marlow Place, off Austin Avenue, and the Council gave us a loan, I think it was..

AS ..for the block of land

RS Yes,

25 mins

AS It was six hundred and something pounds

RS Yes, not very much, and on the basis that, with very little interest, on the basis of selling our own home at Heathcote, which we did, and they went out of their way to sort of settle us in, and we moved into Campbelltown very nicely, because I became an Apex member at Crookwell, you know a bit about Apex no doubt,

AA A little bit

RS ...and we moved in as a young couple with children into a group of fellas all under 40 who had wives and children and it was a wonderful move in. We felt welcome right from the start.

AS And of course they were a service club, they did things like organise the Apex Park, that's just being renovated now up the top

AA Where the billabong's going to be?

AS Yes, yes. All that sort of stuff.

AA So your first impressions of Campbelltown were fairly favourable, then?

RS Yes they were. We chose it initially as a place that we'd like to live because we thought it would be nice to be back closer to our family at Bexley, Ailsa's people and my people both lived at Bexley. We still had a fairly big circle of friends from the Bexley area, even though we'd been away for three years. I felt we moved in, I was very happy at the work, it was a good house, I think it's still a good council to work for isn't it?

AA Yes it is.

RS Yes, it was a very good council to work for and you felt part of the organisation

AA So I'm thing of when, you wouldn't have had long before you moved into the new building then, would you. The new, the big.....

RS We came in August, and we moved into our house in Marlow Place....

AS Andrew means the new council building.

AA The big council administration centre

RS Yes, we were involved in that, the Council, Municipal Engineer at that stage, and I were involved in the supervision of some of the engineering works, in particular the concreting and the reinforcing of the various floors, that engineering part we were involved in. Not solely because the architects would have had consultant engineers doing it as well, but I remember

very clearly taking concrete samples and tests, which were tested to prove the concrete was up to strength, and things like that, yes.

AA Right. It was fairly exciting I believe for the town because it was, like, because of the size of the building. They'd never had anything like that before.

RS No, and it was so different to our early engineering office which was just a few doors up from the School of Arts that you talked about in Lithgow Street, and a little funny incident was that the engineer and I felt, as the Town Clerk and his offsider felt, that if we needed to go up to the barbers, Mort Clissold, a few doors up, from Lithgow Street, we could do that in office time, because our hair grew in work time (laughter).

AA I've heard lots about Mort Clissold

RS Have you?

AA Yeah. So that would have been in the Athelstone building?

AS I can't remember its name. There was a lady's hairdresser there too. Andrew might have been interested in the, when the industrial area at Blaxland Road was being developed and you were doing the drainage there, remember the huge pipes that were driven underneath the ground? It's done all the time now apparently but it was very new then.

RS One of the interesting projects that I was involved in, not solely, but mostly, was to push a 48 inch diameter pipe under the railway just north of Campbelltown Station now

AS Was it near the railway crossing? Because there was a railway crossing there.

RS Under the railway,

AA So where Broughton Street crosses.

RS It would be in that area, yes. The council hired from Fairfield Council the equipment, the very powerful hydraulic equipment, jacks, to do the work, and it was done on a 24 hour shift, because you couldn't let the pipes settle, you had to keep them moving all the time. There was a gang of fellows on a little trolley working in the 48 inch pipe, digging outside the pipe as it was moving forward,

30 minutes

RS ...you get that much, then you put the jacks on and push up to the stop and keep on going. I'm very pleased because it ended up within about an inch of where it should have been at the other end!

AA Okay! Oh wow!

RS Yeah, that was one of the interesting jobs – it made the engineering magazines and stuff like that, so...

AS And of course there were lots of open channels, weren't there, at Campbelltown, when we lived there, because there was a big channel that ran, where did it come from? It must have come across from where the Uniting Church is...

RS Down Dumaresq Street,

- AS** Yes, yes, at the side of all the shops there,
- AA** Yes, so that was still a channel in the early days when you were here
- RS** And that was done in our early years at Campbelltown Council.
- AA** It was known as Sewer Lane apparently, maybe not in the later days but in the early days they called it Sewer Lane, because it was an open drain
- RS** Open, yes, quite a deep ditch. It was a very interesting time to be working for the Council, and I was anxious to be a Chief Engineer, and Jim Waugh the Engineer was well settled in Campbelltown at that stage and the opportunity came up for a Shire Engineer's position at Wollondilly. And I applied for that and got that position and within two years of me taking on the job there Jim left to work for the State Planning Authority, and I think, I don't know, I think, but knowing the Council's ways in those days I would have been the Municipal Engineer here. But I never regretted it, it was a lovely job in the early stages at Wollondilly. That was a developing area too of course, then. But it was an interesting time Andrew, to be working for the Council, we had the industrial area to establish, the bridges there were built in our time, I think with hindsight, if we'd known, we would have made the roads twice as wide as what they are, but, you know.
- AS** Well the Council actually made the wrong decision. They did have the opportunity of putting the main road through where Blaxland Road is didn't they, and they then could have had a very wide road straight away and they didn't do that, and when we moved to Campbelltown the shops there were very old, weren't they, they must have been practically historic, some of them would have been
- RS** Tell Andrew something about the main street of Campbelltown, the shops that were there
- AS** Oh, well I can remember the supermarket, Benjamin's, being where Fosseys used to be. I believe it was Bursill's before then but that was before we were here and ...
- AA** Do you remember the old bank building, there was an old, it was a Bank of NSW I believe, I can't remember when it was demolished but I thought that might have been here, because that was around about near where Fosseys or Bursill's.
- AS** Yes, I only vaguely remember that. I do know something about the bank building near the old Post Office, because a friend of ours who lives in Park Central lost her husband about 3 or 4 years ago, Jim Gorrall was his name but his father managed I think that bank, or worked in that bank years and years ago.
- AA** Yes, I remember the name. Do you remember Tripp's Garage? On the corner of ...
- RS** Yes, yes. I remember that, yes. A very run down old place it looked too! (laughter). Of course what may not be generally known is our works depot was behind the old Town Hall.
- AA** Oh was it? So where the Town Hall where it is now?
- AS** The old Town Hall.
- RS** Where they have the ...
- AA** Where the mall is now.

AS Where the car park is actually isn't it.

RS Yes, yes. That was the Council Depot, and you had an access road, an access track actually down behind the Town Hall, the old town Hall as we were, Campbelltown was growing very quickly, staff wise and equipment wise and we were very soon out of that of course and moved into the new quarters,

35 mins

RS but unless you were involved in the council you probably wouldn't have known about that anyway.

AA I didn't realise the Council Depot was behind the Town Hall.

RS Yes, in that area there, yeah.

AA Because there was football fields there too for a while wasn't there, behind the Town Hall?

AS Where Koshigaya Park is? I don't remember that.

RS It could have been there, I wasn't really into football particularly, tennis was my sport.

AS Yes, because there was originally, so I believe, it's a shame Bev Harrison isn't still alive, she was a Gore, and they sort of lived here forever, and at least one of the old historic houses used to be, I forget whether it was the house of Fisher, or the house of the guy who killed him, had a farmhouse up there somewhere beside the Town Hall. Because I remember going on a historical walk with Bev with our church fellowship group. She was a whiz on all the history of the place, she was amazing.

AA Yeah, Worrall who killed Fisher, his house was where the Town Hall was, right on the same spot. I wanted to ask you, was Fred Fisher built a building, like back in the 1820s when he was alive and it was like an old stone, sandstone building, and it was demolished in the 1960s, and it was behind, kind of behind Fosseys and Bursill's building – you don't remember that?

AS No I don't. There was a road somewhere from Dumaresq Street that went through about halfway between the lane and the Post Office I think, there was another road...

AA Near Coogan Lane, where Coogan Lane is now?

AS Down near the Dumaresq Street end. I can't remember if there was a field there, I remember there was a road there because remember they closed it off, because there was a funny story, which wasn't funny if you were involved in it but apparently there were some nuns travelling in a car and they hadn't realised that the road had been closed off and so they actually sort of drove into it, they weren't injured, but the joke at the time was that the police probably hadn't breath tested them (laughter), but you know what country towns are like, and it was a country town then, which was lovely because you walked down the street...

RS ...and knew half the people.

AS Yes, which was just lovely.

AA Yeah.

AS It was a beautiful place to bring up our children.

AA Yeah, I wish I had've known it when it was like that.

RS It was a lovely place to live.

AA Did you have much to do with the pubs? Did you ever drink at the pubs, or any of the old hotels around the town?

RS The Good Intent, I wasn't, as I mentioned, I wasn't a drinker at that stage, I'm not a drinker now but I remember the Good Intent Hotel and I remember the pub down near the railway station,

AA The Royal.

RS Yes, and of course I remember the pub that was on the corner up...

AS In Cordeaux Street,

RS In Cordeaux Street, on the corner of Queen and Cordeaux. I think, up near the, was it the Good Intent that was the one right up near the southern end of Queen Street,

AA Near where the Campbelltown Mall is,

RS Yes, we used to have our Apex meetings there, and I think Rotary met there as well, so that sort of pub stuff I remember.

AS I thought it was the old Town Hall where we had the meetings, and at the old Town Hall they used to have functions like fashion parades...

RS The actual fortnightly meetings of Apex were at the Good Intent,

AS Well, I never went to that of course because it was the men's club, but they'd have fashion parades and things like that, and concerts as well as the musical society performances. They were very enjoyable and it was great fun and they always had a wonderful musical society ever since we moved into Campbelltown, they really seemed to be a talented group, didn't they.

AA Yeah, they were, there were a lot of talented people around the town.

40 mins

AS Yes, they had some wonderful shows.

Break

AA Ailsa was just talking about the Sesqui-Centenary.

AS I don't remember much of it, it was just part of the Fisher's Ghost Festival, I can't even remember if it was before they changed the time, because they changed the time of year at one stage didn't they, it's in November now, but it was actually originally held in the summer time, and there were regularly thunderstorms and washouts so they thought that they'd change it, and I think there are still thunderstorms (laughter) – you can't escape the weather can you.

AA No. Do you remember the celebrations for the electrification of the railway line and Campbelltown becoming a city?

RS Yes, down at the railway.

AA Because that was a fairly big day.

RS Yes, we attended that, not as...

AS I think you worked at Wollondilly then, at that stage, we were talking to Keith about that this morning because he remembered going down there and I can't remember the name of the Minister for Transport at the time, can you, but he came out. It was amazing, because when we came to Campbelltown and lived in that old house we'd come from Crookwell, where at that stage and no longer there were only two trains a week that went from Goulburn to Crookwell, so we came to Campbelltown and the railway was, it wasn't at the end of the block because there were open paddocks there where the police is

RS But you could hear the trains at three o'clock in the morning but we got used to it very quickly.

AA Did you travel on Pansy?

AS No! One of my biggest regrets, I hope it ends up being my biggest regret, is that we never ever did go on Pansy.

RS We both regret it so much, because we could hear the train going up the incline with the wheels spinning and the sand being applied to the rail, to give the traction (sound effects!) so that was one of our, as Ailsa said, one of our greatest regrets, we feel so foolish and silly that we didn't ever take a ride on it, so..

AS Because we could hear all this, we lived in Marlow Place and it's just down from where St Pat's is now, you see, and I don't really understand about sound, but because it was up the hill, and I suppose the terrain was sort of like a semi-circle, it was like a sounding board and it bounced back I guess.

RS Yes, on those frosty nights, when the ice would have been on the rails when they needed to apply the sand, you've probably heard all this before have you?

AA No no no.

RS Once you've heard it you never ever forget it, because you hear the wheels spinning and then all of a sudden it stops, then you hear this train sort of choof choof choof, it's just so much in our memories. You didn't hear it every time, but when the wind was right I guess, when the night was crisp, the sound travelled up that corridor, straight up into Marlow Place, and the little cul-de-sacs that were in that area, we were at the end of the cul-de-sac and of course the sound would have gone straight into our bedroom

AS And of course it looked over paddocks in the distance, because at some time in the year, I guess it was Autumn, it would have had to be the Autumn I think, we could see a row of lights and they were very distant, Ron bought a theodolite home from work at one stage and had a look through it, because he had to understand about measurements with that sort of thing, and picked up what had to be the lights of Leura. So I presume it was when the leaves came off the trees that you could...

RS We remember the Stations of the Cross when they were regularly held there

AA At Maryfields

RS Yes, yes, and the great queues of cars you know, up the road,

AS Which was the Camden Road then

AA It would be also, like Narellan Road, compared to when you first knew Narellan Road, or Camden Road as it was then, like compared to today, like it's so busy today...

RS That's right, it was a two lane road then, one lane on either side you know, one up, one down, and you remember very clearly our Doctor was a Dr Parnell,

45 mins

RS and he was known to break the speed limit every time between Campbelltown and the Camden Hospital, which was the only hospital of course at that stage, and, you've probably heard his name have you?

AA Well it's funny because I have heard of his name but the other doctor that you mentioned when you came in

AS Dr Thomas

AA Yes, he was a fast driver too apparently.

AS Yes

AA So it must be something about Campbelltown doctors that drive..

RS From the same surgery too because he took over, Parnell took over from Thomas.

AA Right, okay. So did you move from the house near the court-house to Marlow Place did you?

RS Yes, yes.

AA When would have that been?

AS Australia Day, the year after. It was '61.

AA Oh, okay, so you weren't long at the one at....

RS No, no, it was very much in Ailsa's memory! (laughter!) - because of the house you know, it was a funny incident, we've told many many people about it, our children didn't come into bed with us,

AS This was in the old house

RS In the old house that we're talking about, on a Saturday morning they were allowed to come and hop in the bed with us, it was a bit of a treat for them, and I guess a treat for us too. Boys being boys they were very active, and Ailsa and I were sitting in this bed on what was probably a derelict type floor, the kids jumped on the bed and one of the bedposts went 'peow' ...

AS Straight through the floor! (laughter!)

RS It was an old house, but it was a wonderful stop gap.

AS Because it was impossible to rent houses here then, there was a real shortage of rental houses

AA It would have been demolished not long after, would it?

AS Yes, when the library was built, I think.

RS The Deputy Engineer lived in it for a year or two, for the same reason that...

AS No, it was Bruce, darling

RS Bruce McDonald?

AS Yes, Bruce McDonald.

RS That's what I said, the Deputy Clerk didn't I?

AS Engineer.

RS No, I beg your pardon, it was the Deputy Clerk, Bruce McDonald. Bruce lived in it for a year or two while his place in Lithgow Street up here was being built, and then it was demolished.

AA Did you go to the cinema, the Macquarie Cinema in the times that you were here?

RS Yes, it was right opposite!

AA Yeah, that's what I'm thinking!

RS We didn't attend it, I was studying at that stage, and we had the young children, and we went into the...did you ever go to the cinema?

AS I remember seeing Breakfast at Tiffany's there.

RS Yes, well the answer is yes you were. I wouldn't go over there, it wasn't the first time I'd bring a flea back home!! There must have been a flea on the seats, so yes, we know the Macquarie Cinema!!! (laughter!) We know the chap that used to ...

AS Jack Hepher.

RS Jack Hepher.

AA Oh yeah, Jack Hepher. And Fred Eves I think had it too, for a ...

RS I know the name Fred Eves, but I didn't know him personally.

AS I think Jack Hepher didn't own it at the time,

AA Jack Hepher I believe ran the ice-skating rink.

RS Yes, he did, yes, and he was also known and familiar for riding that big penny-farthing bike and stuff like that.

AA Yeah, we've got photographs of him. I actually met him in his very last years, because I interviewed his wife Lily,

AS Yes, she was lovely.

RS They were members of the Campbelltown Uniting Church

AA And the Theatre Group too, yeah. What about any interesting characters, any funny characters in the time that you've been here, especially in the early days. Do you remember any?

RS I remember the Aldermen, of course, particularly that were around about those days, because I was associated with council meetings and stuff like that. Clive Tregear, ah,

AS He was a wonderful man.

AA I was going to ask you

RS Mrs Whitten, the lady mayor.

AA Yeah, Kath Whitten,

RS And she was amongst, in those days, the first, or very early female mayors,

AS And Mary Brookes of course. She was quite a character. Everybody called her Honey, because she called everyone honey.

RS And Cyril Brookes her son, who was one of the Apex members and he died in an accident. Timber fell on him.

AA Yeah, very intelligent man apparently

AS Yes he was.

RS Bit of a character too, he was a bit of a villain actually in the Apex club! Ah, who else do we remember that was..

AS Hank Kruitt

RS Yes, the ambulance officer.

AA Oh, yeah, yes.

AS Because I think Apex raised money for the, was it the fire or the ambulance

RS The ambulance station, yes. Very much involved in that sort of stuff.

AA There was a service station on the corner wasn't there.

AS Yes, Sullivan's.

AA Gordon Sullivan's. Did you know Gordon?

RS And Ann, his wife. Ann, yes.

AS Yes. I think one or two of our sons, Keith, was it Brad worked there, did Keith?

50 mins

RS On the bowsers. Part time. Gordon was a good fellow, he used to do a lot of work for the Council.

AA I've met Gordon.

RS Is he still alive? I know he lived up at the top of ...

AS Well his wife died.

AA His wife died. I haven't heard that he has passed, I think he must be a fair age now. I haven't heard that he has.

RS I imagine he'd be in his nineties now

AA Well into his nineties

RS I'm 87.

AA He'd have to be well into his nineties.

AS He was older than you.

RS He was older than me. Ask us some more questions!!

AA And the ambulance station and the fire station were nearby too weren't they. Any other buildings in the main street, I'm just trying to think, that you had much to do with? Did you go to Downes?

AS Yes.

RS And there was a Downes at Crookwell too.

AS And I'm not sure that it wasn't a Downes that was at Leeton? It was a department store. Totally co-incidental. Isn't it ridiculous! Because there can't have been that many Downes stores. I think there was one at Mascot or something.

RS Remember the G and G store? That was a few doors down from Lithgow Street. In Queen Street a few doors down from Lithgow. Yes, Norm Sharpless was the ...

AS It's where one of the banks is now.

AA Okay, okay. Did you ever go to Carlisles? Do you know where I mean? On the corner of Queen and Broughton. Sort of opposite Gordon's garage, one side of his garage, on the other side of Broughton Street, there was a shop there, actually it was a tyre place after it was a general store. CC Tyre Service.

RS Oh yes, I remember the name CC Tyre now, yes, yes.

AA I'm not sure when the general store finished, it might have been before you arrived here.

AS There was a little old shop, it was a haberdashery shop in Queen Street, I think it must have been near Milgate Lane, do you remember that? Ron's brother became engaged while we were here and I bought a pair of towels from the ladies in there, and it was a very old fashioned, almost historical shop, something that you'd see in, what's the place going towards Coolah, past, ah, Gulgong, it was like one of those very old shops around that area. I don't remember any stores like that in Bega when I was a child so it was really old-fashioned!!!

AA Bega unfortunately lost a lot of old shops on the main street. Bega could be much better, but anyway that's another story.

AS Oh I think Bega's a lovely place.

AA Milgate Lane, so you remember there were houses in Milgate Lane do you? Do you remember that?

AS Vaguely.

RS Vaguely, yes, we didn't know anybody there.

AS There was a lane that went from..

RS Coogan Lane – there was a butchers shop there. I remember that lane.

AA Do you remember the one-armed butcher?

RS Yes! On that lane he was then. That's on the corner there was he? The one butcher? On the western side of Queen Street, up near that corner...

AA Yes, yes.

RS I remember that butcher there, yes. Do you remember that butcher there?

AS Vaguely.

RS Sawdust on the floor, yeah.

AS When I went shopping I had three little kids and a baby so (laughter)...

RS So you were looking after them as well as doing the shopping!

AS Because I'd go shopping and of course Ron had the car for work, and then the children would get driven home by, well it must have, I had my licence then, yes, so I drove them home, but somebody had to push the cane pram home because it wouldn't go in the car!

AA And there was the police station in Railway Street – Railway Street is so much different now.

AS Yes, that's right. Yes, and there was a hair, a barbers shop there too.

RS So how long have you been in Campbelltown?

AA I've only been here fairly recently but because through my job I kind of ..

RS You're picking up all this stuff.

AA Yeah.

RS You sound like a person that's been the same time as we have!

AS Noel Thonklin had the barbers shop in Railway Street didn't he?

RS Who was that?

AS Noel Thonklin It was his barbers shop. He ended up in the arcade.

RS That was a few years after, yes. After Mort Clissold, yes.

AS Because Keith went to school with their son.

AA Do you remember Percy Marlow's old house in Cordeaux Street?

RS No. I don't remember it.

AS Did he have two houses?

AA Well I know he lived in Cordeaux Street next to the doctor's surgery.

AS Well we were told it was Percy Marlow's house that we lived in.

55 mins

RS You've talked about it a few times, and I haven't known enough to correct you on it.

AA Yeah, I've never heard that he, he may have lived where you were.

AS Whose house, because it was, I can't remember the name of the house, it actually had a nameplate on it. But for the life of me I can't remember.

AA Was it Charlie Hannaford, Charles Hannaford?

AS Well perhaps that was Charlie Hannaford's house. Yes, you're right. That's what it is.

AA It was a place called Miramichi.

AS That does sound familiar. Yes, so I've got muddled up, because I never met either of the gentlemen.

RS Thank you for that.

AS Yes, you're right, it was Hannaford's house.

AA Oh right, ok. Because we've got photographs of that, here at the library.

AS It had been a lovely old house, but it had seen better days. I mean you're not going to condemn something for nothing are you.

AA No, no.

AS It probably wasn't historic enough to preserve.

RS They painted the bath for us and things like that so...

AS Which was a disaster.

RS The kids had great fun peeling the paint off.

AA Okay, well that's been, I really enjoyed interviewing you, actually.

RS Thank you.

AA It was really entertaining.

AS A trip down memory lane.

AA Yes it has been. So thank you very much for that.