BRIAR HILL AS I KNEW IT

The memories of Ray Hooper

I was born on 10th January 1930 in the Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. I was taken home to our new War Service Home in Williams Rd, Briar Hill. Briar Hill was sparsely settled in those days with quite a lot of vacant land in the area. It was just like living in the country. I later went to Briar Hill State School No. 4341.

In Williams Rd there was a General Store which sold everything. The first people who ran it were named Raines and had a son Barry. It was later taken over by two men and was then called Dickson & Mulchay’s. This was again sold to the McGrath family who had three children, Billy, Dorothy and Jimmy.

There was also a butcher shop run by Mr Henry Ryan, a brother of Mr Jim Ryan the butcher at Diamond Creek.

I will now mention the names of the people who lived in the area, especially in Williams Rd.

Next door was my Grandfather and Grandmother Cleary. Next to our house on the other side were the Romerils who had six children. I was great friends with them especially Jack who was a year older than me. Then there were the Harrisons, further up the Davies family, then the Kamps and then the Sparrow family. On the other side going towards Beaconsfield Rd were the Howmans, the Hibberts, Gardners, Ketchels, the store, the butcher shop and old Mr Buttle who lived on the corner of Williams and Beaconfield Rds. He lived alone.

I would like to mention that Mr Musselwhite had the grocer’s shop in Montmorency and would come to my Grandmother’s on his draft horse & dray on a Tuesday every week and take her grocery order. He would then return on Thursday with her grocery supplies.

Beaconsfield Rd starts down at Railway Rd and continued up and around until it meets Sherbourne Rd. The first section is very steep and was called Slater’s Hill after Mr & Mrs Bill Slater (Old Bill) and son (Young Bill) and daughter Joan. On the left side going up the hill there were Mrs Lomar and son Billy, then Miss Casey a single lady, Mrs Carter (Bern) and daughters Margaret and Mary, then there were Mrs Schem and family. She was a widow and later married Frank Gardner and became Mrs Gardner. Further up on the left hand side were the McIntyres and family. We always knew when Mr McIntyre had been fishing down at Port Melbourne pier because we had fish for tea that night. It was a real treat in those days. It was a great community as I remember it.

Unfortunately my father died when I was eight and we lost our War Service House because it wasn’t insured. Times were tough in the Depression and we moved in with Grandma Cleary and mother had to go to work.

The next house up was Ted Godwill’s. Ted married Jean McIntyre and they had a family of seven children. They were terrific people. Next were the Hibberts who were cousins of the Williams Rd Hibberts. Following on were the Marks with son Peter. Next were the Israelites, their father had a big blasck beard and all us kids were scared of him. I found out different when I went to the Briar Hill State School with his son.

The Briar Hill State School was a terrific school. Mr Stainsby was Headmaster, a kind man and very clever. Other teachers were Miss Spalding and Miss Heile, who later became Mrs Hope when she married Mr Hope the SEC Line’s Foreman.

I was at the Briar Hill State School No. 4341 until the 6th Grade and then I went to Collingwood Technical School.

Down further were the Taylors. Mr Taylor was the Foreman at Squire’s Timber Mill in Sherbourne Rd after it started up in about 1948. One of my mates at Briar Hill School Wally Dingle worked there and we both ended up playing football with Montmorency starting in 1946. They only had a Senior Team in those days and it was hard to get a game in the early days. But it culminated with both of us playing in the Premiership sides in 1951 and 1954. We were coached by ex-Collingwood players in both years, namely Phil Ryan in 1951 and Ron Hibbert in 1954.

Continuing up the right side of Beaconsfield Rd, there were five vacant blocks. One was purchased after the Second World War by Bob McNamara a returned soldier. He had previously married Cherry Hill who was the sister of my best mate Ray Hill. We used to fish in the Plenty River and catch trout and redfin. It was not polluted then. We also went ferreting together and he was best man at my own wedding.

Next after McNamara’s there were the Rowans; Jack Rowan later became a Roads Inspector with the Diamond Valley Shire. Jack and his brother Pat or Ticky ass he was known often would get into fights with one another because Ticky would give Jack cheek. You would hear the yelling, and then Ticky would come flying across the vacant block with Jack in hot pursuit. But Ticky was too speedy for Jack.

Next to Rowans was Miss Humphries who had a little shop which sold sweets and soft drinks. Boy you could buy two malt bombs for a halfpenny, they were the days.

Then there were the Kelly’s. Mr Kelly used to stop your football boots for one shilling and sixpence. They brought up their grandson Wayne. His mother had taken sick and passed away as far as I knew. He has been associated with the Montmorency Football Club for many years. Naturally he was called “Ned” Kelly. Then there was the Thomas family.

On the other side of the railway next to the road bridge where Lovitt Engineering is, was quite a large market garden belonging to a Mr Spalding who lived alone. He had vegetables growing over about an acre of ground. The local people bought their vegetables from him at very cheap prices. In approximately 1938-39 the Plenty River flooded and came up just below the old road bridge in Para Rd for approximately 200 metres and Mr Spalding’s vegetables were destroyed.

Up further along Para Rd was the Francis Xavier Catholic School of about 25 pupils. It was also used as a church. There were many vacant blocks of land further along which went down to the Plenty River. There was a deep hole at that point in the river where all the kids and their parents used to swim in summer. It became shallow at the Montmorency end and was only eighteen inches deep.

Next along were the Holmes family with five children. They were very poor and were helped by all the people of Briar Hill and churches etc.

Up further the road continued on at the bottom of the hill and Sims Rd went off to the right. Everything has changed now. There was a family living on the corner of Sims Rd called Bedford.

Where the railway bridge crossed from Sherbourne Rd was a tee intersection and on the other side was Jim Davies dairy farm where they milked about forty cows by hand in those days. Where the sludge washed down into the paddock all was where all the kids dug for worms for fishing. The road continued on down past the Montmorency Football and Cricket club.

Going up Sherbourne Rd on the left was Rupert Davies and wife, the brother of Jim Davies. He had a truck in which he moved furniture and all general goods around the district. Then there were the Charles family whose son Don played for Montmorency Football club. The Gamble family, then vacant blocks of land until up at the top of the hill was the Middleton family on the left and the Bryan family on the corner of Mountain View Rd and Sherbourne Rd on the right side.

From the bottom of the hill on the right side were the Bayliss and Geyer families then vacant paddocks until Mr Fred Squires built his timber mill. His son Jimmy also played with Montmorency Football club. Mr Squires built a shop opposite the mill selling timber, hardware and fishing gear.

I now go to Gladstone Rd which begins down near the railway bridge where it joins Railway Rd. On the left side were the Bowie’s. Mrs Jean Bowie was a great friend of my mother; her sons were Harold and Lawrie. Later on I played a lot of golf with Lawrie. Their house was flooded in the 1938-39 floods. The gold fish were washed out of their pond and into the Plenty River where they flourished.

Just past Bowies was a track around the Plenty River to Britt’s Pool where people swam in the summer and fished it too. It was a good spot.

Then further up were Mr Peter Negri and his sons, Bob and Conn who both played football for Greensborough. Mr Negri had a big bird aviary with some beautiful birds in it. Then was the Gidmans who had the best quinces. There were a few vacant blocks and then the Brailsford family. There was a small lane between Mountain View Rd and Gladstone Rd it has been closed off now.

On the other side were people I did not know, then the White family with sons Billy and Alan and daughter Dawn. I was very good friends with Alan and we worked together in two different engineering companies for over twenty seven years. They were Lovitts in Para Rd and Anthony Bearings in Keon Park.

Further up the hill were the Staggards.

(Here Ray’s memories end.)