

It's 21st June, 1982 and Arthur and I are going to Strathallan to visit Miss Sylvie Cook, and we're taking an album with us with lots of photographs of Rudder Grange and we're hoping to get a fair bit of history from her.

Where the canoe shed was, down here. They camped opposite us.

Opposite Rudder Grange?

Yes, they used to come there at weekends. I don't know whether they slept there at night.

Shakespearian actors?

Yes. What does it say there, Marriott? The Marriotts lived up on the hill.

Your father originally bought the property off Marriott?

I don't know, I can't remember, I don't know who the property was bought from. There's a picture there of the property when we went in.

Down below Rudder Grange, next door to Rudder Grange, there was this boathouse too. There's the picket fence of Rudder Grange, you had a picket fence running up alongside. This is Alphington Street there, this is where Marriotts lived up the top there in that house there, and Rudder Grange would be down there, and next door to you is this other boatshed.

Yes, there was a little boatshed there, right opposite. It was in that that the actors camped.

On the same side of the River then, the actors camped?

Yes, and they could go into the theatre and they spent the weekends there.

Would you remember the name of the gentlemen that owned that?

I don't know, not at that time. I think there was one of our customers, I think his mother bought it later on but I don't know when.

McMahon, does that ring a bell?

No. I don't think it was Nolan.

Looking across where that building was, and there was Rudder Grange, the old shed, your first shed that you had. You remember the motor boat coming up river?

Yes, Burns. That was from Studley Park. I think they came up at one time right from the City and they used to get out at the Falls and change over into a motor boat.

This was getting into the late 1920's and 1930's.

Yes.

So this was a Burns boat and the engine in it I believe was built by James Marriott.

Who's James Marriott?

He was the gentleman that lived up on the hill and we figure he may have taken these photographs.

I couldn't say. There were girls, were there daughters of the Marriotts?



There were daughters and sons.

Sons, I don't think I remember the sons.

1934, and mother died three years after him. He was just gone as the flood, he died in November and we had the flood in the December.

What did you do when all the water was there, where did you move to?

Well it rained of course, and some friends came out from Surrey Hills and said take your mother up. I said we had a flood downstairs once before, I don't want to move mother, she was elderly and I had to dress her and undress her. They persuaded me at last, so I collected mother's things, a lot of her clothes and warm things, and they took us across in a boat. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson just up on the hill, they had a spare room and they put me in there with mother. The flood was up to the top storey in one day.

We couldn't move things, they had a job to get all the canoes out. The canoe shed held 80 canoes and they put them out in the street. Well, of course, they had to move them all higher up the hill. The houseful of furniture and everything was just left in the house.

Did you get anything ruined?

Everything was, all the mattresses. All the neighbours all round had sheets and blankets and things all hanging on their lines.

They were only babies, they're not really interested.

They may be interested in photographs of where you used to live.

I don't think they would be.

Two nephews?

One's up in Queensland, he's married and he's just retired, and the other boy lives down here in Melbourne, he's single. But they didn't know anything much about Rudder Grange, they were only children.

Nan Cherry, she was a friend who came a lot to stay with us. That was down on the river, that's the verandah there.

Nan Cherry, she was your friend.

Yes.

The fountain is still there, but what's that, a big clam shell it looks like there.

Yes, we had one or two of those.

Who built the fountain, did your father build that?

Yes.

There's another big clam shell up on the -

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We must have had two or three of them, those shells. I don't know where they came from.

This must be the first day the fountain was going, everybody's standing round there looking at it.

There may have been something on, there might have been a party of people there.

Tell me a bit about the tea rooms and all that there.

Which tea rooms.

Didn't you have tea rooms there where you had afternoon teas, Devonshire Teas.

I'll show you a picture, one of those, where are the big pictures. We'll pick out the one and I'll show you when we bought the place. The boatshed, the canoe shed there, it's only just a shed.

Where were you living when that shed was built?

That's after we went, that shed was there when we went in, and there was a three roomed cottage on the premises, that was right up on the hill.

In Alphington Street?

In Alphington Street, there was a big piece of land we bought right up, a lot of land.

Was the three-room cottage near Johnsons?

Oh no, it was up the hill a bit. That's the canoe shed, is the little cottage there, yes that's it.

This is Johnson's house, that's just been pulled down, only the last two months.

Johnson's house, not Johnson's.

No, Johnson's had left there many years ago, but the house they used to live in, that's gone now and there's a new house going up.

Is there one on stilts?

Yes, there are two now, there's two on stilts in the old Rudder Grange grounds, and they've been there for about 15 or 20 years those two houses on stilts.

I think we drove down one day and I saw this house on stilts.

There was a brother older, he died when he was 23, after they got to Rudder Grange.

So you're the only remaining Cook now.

I'm the only one, yes. That's where the fountain was built afterwards.

Some of these are probably duplicated in this album.

That's just after my brother died, that was taken. You see the three room cottage and see the boatshed, and that's the old street, that's the tree.

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It's not there now, vandals burnt it. It was known as the canoe tree because it had this big piece cut out of the bark.

Yes, that's right. Of course people wouldn't come down the hill, when we first went there they wouldn't deliver things to us at all, because they wouldn't drive down the hill.

That would be a horse and cart then wouldn't it, there was no road?

Yes, there was road and gutter across, in the street you mean. There was a sort of a road and there was a gutter across and then it was all grass, with no road.

Below the Esplanade was all grass?

Yes. In later years, they all came down.

Tell me how many people used to come down at the weekends and have teas?

Well a lot. We went there intending to have poultry, we wanted more land. Then father had the boat down there and people came up the river. We want a cup of tea, can't we have a cup of tea, why can't we have a drink, and so they decided they would and they did that down there. Then father decided he would have to alter the house, and they took the cottage and turned it round and built the big house.

Was there a staff working there serving?

Yes, we had girls at the weekend, we'd have one in the pantry, one woman washing up and 4 or 5 girls waiting. I didn't do any waiting at all, I was in the cash register and took the cash. Mother did all the carving, Mother did all the cooking of the poultry. We had chicken and ham.

You used to serve meals like that?

Yes, all cold. Lamb and beef and cornbeef.

So you could go and have a luncheon or afternoon tea?

Luncheon or afternoon. There was a big verandah in the new place and there were blackwood trees and there were big bluestones, and in that they put the table and a couple of chairs or forms.

That's one of the old bowers that you used to have. I remember that as a lad coming down with my parents, we used to come down.

They were all named, the Blackwoods and the Jungle and the Arbor, and there were all stones round and outside there were all bushes and things.

Did you use to get parties of people coming down, they'd book would they?

Yes, we had big parties of people, choirs from Church, and we provided them with tea and cups and saucers. But father wouldn't have any drink, he wouldn't allow any drinking at all. The parties used to come up and want drink. At the weekends there were lots of couples, couples in canoes and parties of 4 or 6. It was busy on Saturdays and Sundays and holidays and Mother did all the carving, carved the ham and the chicken, she used to do the chicken beautifully. She didn't give anybody a leg of chicken or a wing, she cut those all off and made chicken and ham and lettuce cut up and tomato, and a little jug with salad dressing. She did all the carving.

You must have had a lot of people down there?

Yes we used to have a lot.

Was that the first pipeline across the river?

Yes, they haven't got a different one now have they?

Yes.

Did they rebuild it all. That was covered at the time of the flood.

It was smashed in 1942 remember, and in 1934. No.2 Alphington Street, that last house in Alphington Street, got swept away and went down stream and hit it and broke it in half. Then they made it two pipes and they put a walking track across the top of it and its been closed for the last 12 years and its just been opened again, back to one single pipe with a walking track across. That's the original pipe bridge that went from Kew to Fairfield.

It's all bare there, nothing there. We first served things at the river, we started by the little cottage I think and then we went down and did it at the shed and then Father built the house. Mother did all the gardening and the moving of these big stones.

She was a hard worker by the sound of it.

A wonderful one.

Remember that one Miss Cook? There was a wire going across and we wondered what it was for. Had a banner on it with refreshments for people coming up the river.

Look at the old-fashioned people here. That tree sticking out, isn't that a tree.

Yes, that's under the landing, it came up out of the landing. Your father cut that off and he built the landing out over the top of it. The stump is still there, holding up what's left of the old landing.

Part of that was washed away in the flood. That's a picture of Rudder Grange, that's the big house, the back part.

How old did you say you were Miss Cook?

87. After we got there, Father was doing something and I fell in the river and I learnt to swim at once.

Did you spend a lot of time on the river in canoes.

Yes, I had a canoe. I had a girlfriend that used to come from Footscray, she used to come and stay all night and we went out on the river.

Where was Mrs. Purcell?

She is now in a Home. She used to live right up on the top of the hill in Alphington Street, Alice Purcell.

I know the name.

She remembers you quite well.

I know the name well, I can't just place her. She lived in one of those houses along in Alphington Street.

The three Connors girls, well she lived next door.

The Connors, the father of course would be gone.

They're all gone now.

They're all gone, fancy. One wasn't much older than I was. Macauleys?

Macauleys are all gone.

I don't suppose the river is ever used now.

Studley Park building is still running as a boatshed and Van Der Sluys have it now.

Nothing down at Fairfield, Fairfield Park?

The old building is still there, the old boatshed there and the Council at this stage is wondering what they will do about it because it's all dilapidated and broken down.

Who had that place when you remember it, the one at Fairfield Park?

I don't remember who had that.

George Power, you remember that?

I know that was running, I knew they were there.

All these boats tied up at the landing, where is that?

That's at our landing.

You had all those rowing boats did you?

Yes we had a good many, there are about 6 or 8 there.

They were all built by Burns. Your father never built the boats did he?

No. I had boots on and an ordinary dress and I found I'd taken everything for Mother and I had nothing except what I stood up in.

Did the flood come up so quickly that you didn't think that everything was going to get covered? You never thought to take anything out of the house?

No we didn't have time. They were all working at the canoes and things, I don't think we attempted to move anything. Then when I took Mother, the Council came and cleaned it all, it's frightful the muck it leaves behind.

The Council came and did it?

The Council came with their brooms and their mops and did inside the house.

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They used to come down in cars. One horse and jinker went in the river, I think it must have been tied up, there wasn't anybody in it and the horse was drowned, went right into the river. They used to come up and down alright and people all came with the deliveries, the ice and the icecream. The icecream you had to turn the handle, and we had a very big ice chest.

There's a tent, which looks as if they've camped down on the river, but I think its the opposite side to Rudder Grange where the old original boathouse was, because in some of these photographs we can see right down the bank and that old boathouse is gone, it had been pulled down. So people used to camp on the river there apparently.

It might have been the actors that you told us about.

I think there was a shed when the actors were there.

The actors stayed in the shed?

There was a wooden shed when the actors were there. Before that I don't remember much about it.

And this is along the landing, and there's the old boatshed down there.

Yes, and the boats out in the street. The water here, the water right up, it wouldn't be anywhere near the house

Well, it would have got pretty near to the house.

Don't you remember that flood, the 1911, how old would you have been then. What year were you born?

1894 was it.

It was in the bottom but not up the top?

After the big house was built, it just came and covered the floor I think,

That must have been 1911. It would have been judging by the height, because here's the picket fence that used to run up the side of Rudder Grange, and incidentally there is portion of that picket fence still left standing there today, just a little bit of it, but its still there.

And there's a big house built there isn't there?

No, there's nothing there now, but there were two houses where the ground behind Rudder Grange.

Where Rudder Grange was, isn't there a house.

No, nothing. There built up a little bit higher than that, they're up on stilts these two houses.

Yes but where Rudder Grange was originally.

No, there's no house there.

It hasn't been a canoe place for a long time. About 1945 it ceased being a canoe place. Carl Serak sold it then to a Clive Caporn who had a boat building business.

We're back now to see Miss Sylvie Cook— 6th August, 1982

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What was mother's name, her christian name

Ellen.

And father?

Father was Edmand David.

He had two brothers?

Fred was one, and there was Joe, I think that was all.

When did they come from England?

I understood from Mother that I was about 5 years old, on the ship. The husbands came out first, William Boley, he came early then the family came later. And I think it was the same with Father's people, they came out later.

Did Father build Rudder Grange?

Yes, he did. You saw the picture there of the funny little house. I think he turned it round and built, it was a big place.

He did the actual work himself?

Yes, and Uncle Fred, he was a cabinetmaker, and Father was a cabinetmaker, and as far as I remember, they may have had other hands. He was so anxious Father about whether there might be a flood, and I think he must have put stones and things all round. That place was right in the force of the water for two or three days.

You had a flood in 1911.

Yes it just came up to the floor of the new building, just up to the floor. It's wonderful how that building stood.

And then in 1934, of course, it went right up to the roof.

About 3 or 4 in the top storey, but the current must have been very bad right out there.

And then of course they had three or four more floods after 1934.

I don't think so.

Yes, we were in one of them. We had a flat there.

Do you know where the name "Rudder Grange" came from?

I think there's a book called Rudder Grange.

Who wrote that, would you have any idea?

I can't remember.

What did it mean, do you know, it must have meant something to your Dad.

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Basically it's in memory to the King that died, which was King Edward VII, and hailing George V. Edward VII had died, in memory of Edward VII and George V coming to the Throne. From the children of Fairfield, but we don't know whether that's in the School or Hall up there, do you remember anything about that?

I went to the Fairfield School but I don't remember much about it.

We had a cow for a good while. That's Basset my brother, and that's the cat, he's feeding the cat.

Is this the little cat that was mixed up in the flood?

Probably it was.

I know we stored the canoes in the shed and I think there were three racks. I think they were 1/6d. a week I suppose, for storage.

You don't remember how much they charged to hire them out?

So much an hour, I think it was about a shilling an hour. I think the boats held about 4 or 6 people and a party went up the river and they said they'd be back later, and didn't come back. So father was going to town, he went with my brother, to see if they could find this boat. They were away all day, they found it up the river and it was on a snag, gone right through the boat, and the boat was fixed on the snag. They saw a farmhouse not far away and they went over to the farmhouse and they lent them a saw and they sawed it off and towed it home.

Do you remember many of the names of your other neighbours who were living there at the time?

Johnsons, and Collins, he was a Estate Agent. Marriotts.

Marriotts and Johnsons and Collins, that would be about all that was down there wouldn't it?

Yes I think it was.

Were there any houses in the next street, do your remember, over in Yarraford Avenue?

No I don't remember any over there. I wasn't well for a long time. I know the Doctor gave a certificate to keep me away from School for twelve months, and I went over to Sydney to stay with some friends, I know I had my seventeenth birthday there. Then after that I got sick again and I was on crutches for 12 months or so, I think it was rheumatic fever.

Did many people use that track on the other side of the River?

Yes, people used to go walking along there.

Did you walk along there very much?

Yes, I used to go over, I used to go swimming in the mornings in the hot weather, one or two of the neighbours used to come down, Butlers, they lived not far away, Mr. and Mrs. Butler. There was the bridge up, the outer circle bridge, the old railway bridge.

You couldn't walk across the pipe bridge then, it was just a pipe. There wouldn't be many motor vehicles coming down in those days, bringing the people to picnics, or were they coming down with horses and jinkers.

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Father was a great reader, and he'd read about people having meals out in gardens, overseas people having food, eating things outside, and that gave him the idea, that's why he wanted to have it in the garden. But Rudder Grange, I think it's from that book that they named it.

I also believe there is a place in England called Rudder Grange, so the book may have been about that place in England.

A pity I can't remember the author.

We'll try and find out about it.

When Father first came to Rudder Grange, did they start growing flowers, have a flower garden, to sell.

Before we went there? I don't know, I couldn't remember. All I know is they had the boats.

Your family weren't involved in growing flowers?

No, not for sale.

Do you remember the orchards around there, right near where you lived?

Opposite, there were just the trees, I don't remember them getting much fruit off them or anything like that, I just remember the trees were there.

We can see in the photographs and we assumed that they could have been pears or apples or something like that.

Do you mean down near the bottom.

No, up the top of the hill.

That must have been when I was little. There weren't many houses - Marriotts, I think that was there when we went.

Then there was a place opposite Marriotts, not in Alphington Street, but it faced Park Crescent.

Henderson's lived there.

I think it was Hendersons. Well there's a big orchard in that property.