

Presentation to Oatley Heritage and Historical Society
May 2014

The material below is from the original recoding of the talks.

Jack Gray:

It is a long time since I lived in Oatley. My memory will be rather generalised.

Dallyel and I went to school together. We still see each other regularly. Trouble is that Bill lives at Pymble and I live at Bulli. We meet at Oatley or surrounds quite regularly.

We'll be talking about the Eastern side of the railway line. We rarely ventured over the west side.

I'll start with my life history. I was born in Erskineville ... After two years they brought us out here. She bought 38 Annette Street Oatley and 38A and 36 Annett Street... she bought a block of land at the corner of Neville and Annette streets. That block actually included Annette Street and she owned Annette Street between Neville Street and Russell Street. It was only when she decided to build four semi detached cottages in Russell street that the council said you have to give us Annette Street before we give you possession or permission to build.

She parted with Annette Street or she could have exacted a toll on everybody there.

When she built the four houses in Russell Street they cost £600 each. All the stonework was quarried from the site. Things have changed.



About Oatley schools...Early photographs...that was me before we moved to Annette Street when I was two years old.



That's our motor car and apparently we had and I was apparently learning to drive at a very early age. You can see the flight on the side there – I still have one of those at home. This one shows one of the friends that were visiting.

That's family, father on the left, mother on right, self and Jill.

This is the best photograph I can give you of 38 Annette Street. It ran from the road to the water. Just there you can see another house, which was 38A.





Rosa and Neville
corner

On the right that 36 Annette Street. That's a boat shed with living quarters above it.

Mum bought the two blocks from the road to the water in those days.

Oatley School was only a small school. There was no kindergarten. Everybody walked to school. From our place in Annette Street, we walked along Annette Street and we cut up through the bush into Rosa Street. There was more bush between Rosa Street and Letitia.

If you walked to Oatley station you walked diagonally from the school straight to the station. Plenty of bush around.

When he went to school, Mr Fitzgerald was our headmaster. He administered discipline freely. He had a cane which he called – but he forgot what it was. We all grew up with the cane. It seems to have vanished.

We were regularly caned. Most of the boys had bare feet. It was the height of the depression. I asked every day if I was allowed to go barefoot.

One of the boys came to school regularly wearing sugarbags. One end had a hole cut out for his head and two holes in the corners for the arms.

Another one of the boys collecting the scraps of food, put them in a sugar bag and he gave them to the family chooks.

All roadwork was done using picks and shovels and hammers. No mechanical devices except for a horse and dray which was owned by one of the locals.

There was usually a black smith's forge set up in the area to keep the tools sharp.

You could walk across Oatley bay at low tide. You were up to your knees in mud. We did give this up after a girl was taken by a shark in Oatley Bay.

Fisherman often ran their net out from a sandy bank next to our place. We would go down and help them pull the net in.

We rewarded with a couple of fish or prawns. Every now and again a fisherman would appear around the bay calling out "Fisho" and you could buy freshly caught fish.

Flathead, bream – they were the two main fish.

Couple of local interests: Silvesters Castle. I think there are still bits of it there. It was a good place to play. It was near Como Bridge.

You could walk over the bridge and if you heard a train coming you stepped off the track onto the girders on the side of the bridge until the train passed.

Mortdale pictures: we'd go across there: threepence or sixpence entrance fee.

Milk: daily deliveries in a stainless tank mounted on a horse drawn cart. Milkman was a relation of the shopkeeper. Lived opposite our place in Annette Street.

There was a little shop in Annette Street just opposite 36.

The dairy was at Peakhurst on Boundary Road close to the intersection of Forest Road.

That was just a paddock and it is now covered with factories.

Fresh fruit was delivered daily – horse and cart. Mr Peasley delivered it.

He used to have his lunch on the grassy area and our place. He'd take the sugar of chaff over the horses' head and he would sit down under a tree and have his lunch.

Dad was secretary to Sydney Amateur Sailing Club and Prince Alfred Yacht Club.

Both those clubs were rather small in those days. One secretary ran both. He used to take me up to Pittwater and I was allowed to pull the starters' gun for the Pittwater Regatta. The Pittwater regatta has gone by the way now. There are so many boats around.

Because our boatshed was not a deep water front, the boatshed was built on a platform some 12-15 feet from the shoreline. A wall ran out a further 20 feet – there were a set of steps down to the muddy foreshore.

From the boat shed two wooden rails ran parallel out to the bay floor and you put the boat on the trolley and winch it up into the boat shed. The winch was entirely of wood, a wooden drum and wooden handle to turn the drum. There were no electric things in those days.

That 38 Annette Street taken from half way up in the water. The path on the left was sort of built after the path on the right. The path on the left is entirely blocks of stone. The veranda ran around the four sides of the house.

That a view from 38 Annette street to the bay. Jill did a lot of work on the garden, which was half way down...

All the stonework on the left...

That's the waterfront with a small grassy bank on the left.

Another view showing you Baldface in the distance. Connells points on the left and Oatley point on the right. Nice calm day.



There was a boatshed repair place on the left there, Taylor's house on the point – still standing a few years ago.

A lot of these places had nicknames.

That's a canoe we built. Bill's father taught us how to handle the wood.

That's dad. He was secretary of the club, and on the right is Pittwater.



That's the first part of the wharf that ran from our waterfront to the boatshed. And the baths were fully enclosed with wooden palings and net to keep the sharks out.

No water wings. We used a lump of wood. The palings had to be replaced every few years.

This is a swimming party – don't who they are. Jill could probably tell you who they are.

You can see me in the bottom left, second from the left.

I must have been about 3 or 4 there. That's 90 years ago.

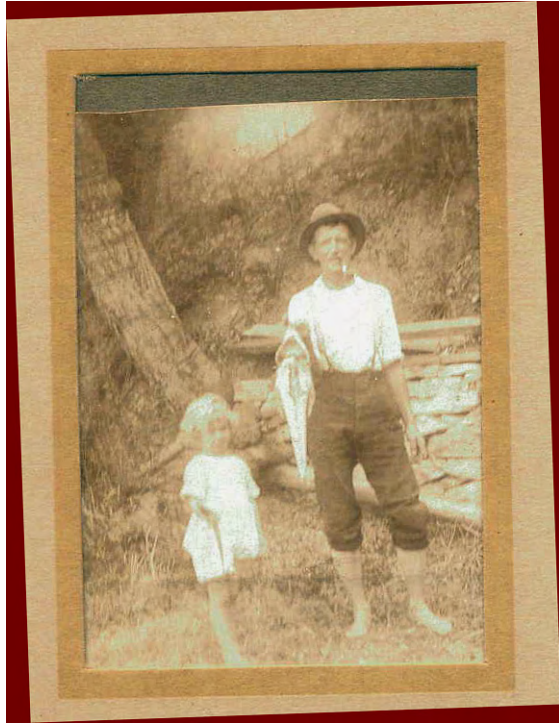
The man sitting down with his arms folded is Uncle Eddie who is related to Chiswells.

Oatley was not a big place. Everybody knew everybody. There were a lot of swimming parties.

Learning to row. Rowing boats only then.

The model yacht that I had. It vanished during the war.

We built boats, VJs.



On the right at the back is Mr Rack, a plumber, who used to do work on the houses. As you can see there were fish in the river apparently of appropriate size.

Rack used to take me around to the houses he was doing work on. That's the way jetty walls were constructed.

The shed was built on a very big platform and the pipes were filled with cement.

That's the first car I remember, a 1924 Dodge. That had high pressure tyres, 60 something pounds per sq. inch. We went out for a ride to the country, to Condobolin, with corrugated road. You had to go at least 60 mph to jump from the top of one corrugation to the next otherwise you'd shake the car to bits.



The boat on the left in a rowing boat and a little dog I had and the boat on the right is a canvas sailing boat that dad built.

That's a VJ out in the middle of Oatley Bay.



That's one that I put in to show you the boats that sailed on the harbour in the old days. They were big boats and carried a lot of sail and they really moved.

When we were boys we would row up to the top of the Woniora River. We went up when the tide was running in and came out when the tide was running out.

At our stage we built ourselves a diving helmet – a kerosene tin with one end cut out, you put it over your head, semi circles to put over your shoulders padded with rags. A small rectangle at the front so you could see and a valve connected to an inner tube on the top so you could breath. And your weight was a sugar bag full of stones which was over your shoulders. A garden hose ran from valve back to the boat where we had a foot pump to send air to us.

You tied a rope around your waist and that went back to the boat and we walked all over the bottom of the Woniora River. And in those days before the dam was built the water was crystal clear. Nice sandy bottoms.

To get out you just lifted the helmet and swam out to the boat.

We build a 12 foot double ended canoe and that Bill and myself used a lot on the river.

One trip in particular, we just paddled down to Weeney Bay and then carried the boat over the sandhills and put it in the surf. We then went down to North Cronulla, turned to go

into the beach and saw what we presumed was a shark in the water, tried to paddle faster. The wave turned us over and we walked on the water for the last 10 yards. When we turned around and looked, we saw six or eight porpoises that had decided to accompany us.

You could get around the river in those days. You didn't need a motor boat.

One day, dad bought home an Archimedes outboard motor and I think came through the yacht club. We used that motor so often that water pump that was made a brass wore out.

Well, that was not a problem. We just got a jam tin and poured the water over the motor and that kept them cool. Occasionally, if a bit of water hit the plugs, you'd get a good shot up the arm. But the motor kept going.

It was about that time, Dad built the sailing canoe. It was an open boat about ten feet long with canvas coverings. I could not wait to learn to sail because if we tipped over, we could not right the boat, we would drift down the river and someone would see you and row out and tow us ashore. We'd bail out and sail home.

One day bought plans for a 12 foot sailing boat. It was a new design by a member of the yacht club. The boat is now known as a Vaocluse Junior.

That we built on the lawn beside the house during the school holidays between school and university and it cost 12 pounds 10.

Now if you capsize you could right the boat quite easily. A few months later, we joined with boys from Connells point and we formed a sailing club. No two boats were the same.

We sailed on Sundays, the course ran from Connells point down to Baldface into Oyster Bay and back to Connells point. And then a couple of times around and we had about six to eight boats.

Oatley Pleasure grounds: very popular on weekends. Although they had some 20 rowing boats they were always out on Saturdays and Sunday. There were races on Sunday mornings in the baths.

In the Pleasure Grounds they had several large cages with birds in them and they were quite an attraction. There was also a wine bar and refreshments.

It was one of my jobs was to chop the trees interfering with the view.

Elsie painted the roof of the boat shed, the big one next door, about 30 feet above shore level. We had a lot of Christmas bush growing on the place. It only grows on the eastern shore. We'd pick the Christmas bush and make it up into bundles and when I had a licence we drove to Hurstville and sold them at the foot of the steps, one shilling a bunch and that was our Christmas money.

Canning shop: it was a little shop opposite our place on the corner of a large open paddock. This paddock was the place for our yearly bonfire. There was no restriction on bonfires and crackers.

A few blocks along the street, we had a boot maker who would repair and resole our shoes.

A few houses along were a boat builder with Fletcher's boat shed. He was good to us as children. And when we were building boats or carts, he would give use planks.

He became a bit religious later on and installed loud speakers and treated Oatley Bay and Connells Bay and Oatley River to a weekly sermon. But the police closed him down after a month or two.

A few months later he committed suicide by shooting himself.

I learned to drive on the Dodge car on the 24 model. It did not have synchromesh gears in those days. In order to change down from top to second gear, you needed to double-declutch.

There was a police station at Oatley- one policeman with not much to do. When I went for a licence, he said drive up the end of the street and back. "Yes, that's OK" and you have your licence- no problem. The Police Station was next to the Hotel that is now a car park for the hotel.

From Oatley School I went to Sydney Technical High School in Paddington near Victoria Barracks- again you walked to the station and caught the train to Central and walked up Foveaux Street to Paddington. Trams were available but they cost money. After that I went to University and then to the war.

I joined the army early in the war- 4 years in the army- a couple of years in Northern Queensland and a couple in New Guinea (Wau). Wau is 160 miles north of Moresby. Damien Parer did photos whilst I was doing my dental surgery work in New Guinea. He said he needed light to take the photo so we stood



outside. The boys in the photo we my assistants.

PHOTO ????

Then back to the house at Bexley and then to Cronulla until late 1980's. The surgery was in Bexley and in the city for a short period- then in Cronulla.

Jacks sister Jill McKenny (nee Gray) was present. She was a hostess for airlines. She was a head sister for the Red Cross and met Eleanor Roosevelt as Eleanor visited and was head of the US Red Cross. She also met Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent head of the UK Red Cross.

The story below is transcribed from Cliff Crane's notes and talk about Bill Dalyell.

Bill Dalyell was one of 5 children. The family descended from a General Dalyell who set up a barony in 1600's. Bill would now be Baron and sit in the House of Lords. Bill's parent purchased 3 blocks of land in Rosa Street in 1920's – the northern block originally had a garage. The house was built as a single story but is now double story. Rex Roberts live in the next block and this was a tennis court until Rex bought it for £2000 and built a house. The block had an old tram numbered 1303 as the tennis court shed but vandals had destroyed the tram and it was disposed of. Bill's father was a professional man- a land surveyor. Before enlisting in WW1 Douglas Dalyell was in the New Hebrides employed by a South Malay Rubber Company that never produced rubber but copra. Bill's father managed it. Bill's father initiated a bakery on the island and also salvaged wrecks of ships- extracting copper and brass. He came back to enlist in WW1. He trained to be an officer in Sydney

before leaving on "Roonick" in 1917 for England (as a side the Roonick was in Halifax harbour when the "Halifax Explosion" occurred). He went to Perrone in France but after one week the war was over so he never saw action and hence he was not permitted to have a war pension. In England he asked Ann Watson to marry him and they came back to Sydney on the "Roonick". Bill Dalyell was conceived in England and born in Potts Point in January 1920.

PHOTO SHOWN IN UNIFORM)

His parents lived near Fairfield but Douglas wanted to live in Oatley because his grandfather had lived here. Around 1923 in Ada Street they lived whilst their house was being built in Rosa. Bill went to school in Oatley with Sell end, Cameron, York. Rosa Street was gravel and they had vegetable garden, fruit trees and chooks and geese on the property. They walked everywhere. At OPS he met Owen Hodge and they took sandwiches to school for lunch. Once Bill found a handbag in the street and it was from a house burglary in Oatley. A few weeks later he found another handbag in the street.

Oatley was during the depression. ????

His farther got a car about 1950 (Green Morris Minor) before he died. Although electricity had been connected many houses still used candles. Strangers would want assistance in the depression but father always gave them a drink or food. Fishing was important for food and for raising funds. "pinching" oysters was done but if caught by the oyster farmers then they were rough.

North of their house in Rosa were the Martin family- Rita Drake (nee Martin) lived there- moved to 20 Annette Street - Percy Drake (but known as Bob Drake senior- not the current Bob Drake)

Slam Sullivan of Annette St. was not known to Bill- but Bill went to a Sullivan at northern end of Ada St. where he learnt boxing in a garage. This Sullivan taught boxing in the School of Arts. Bill also learnt boxing at Sydney Grammar School. Other boxers at School of Arts were Frank Glover and Len and Arnold Burt.

There was a corner shop in Annette St- Mrs Davies ran the corner shop at Neville and Rosa – she was deaf and shouted all the time. Alf Fletcher took his life in Annette St. but before that they lived in Rosa. Joyce Bray now Marks was remembered.

Silvester's castle was used and the Yorks got much of the old stonework from the site. Shirley Midson was known and the Yorks lived nearby in Port Macquarie. Bert York was a keen astronomer. He learnt this from Doug Dalyell use was a surveyor and he had used the stars in his work. Another man Sutton from Letitia St. was also interested in astronomy. Bill went to Sunday school- C of E- wooden building. A Mr Lewis was in charge of the Sunday school.

Bill's brothers (Jim and John) both went to Sunday school. Jim was in a chair and rarely well. The choirmaster was named Brandt and he was crippled and he was a court reported.

No school tuckshop but little shop next door south of school was there. Mr and Mrs Brown ran the shop and son Ogg lived there and was in WWII. The speciality was "pea roll". There were a number of native trees in the school playground- they used pen and ink. Boys were given the dirty job of filling the inkwells, as teachers would not do it. Bill's friends at school were Owen Hodge and his brothers Noel, Ian and Brian, and Harold Speed and Frank Glover. Headmaster had a mate called "Johnny" aka the cane. His class teachers were 1st Miss Phillips, 2nd Mary Boland 3rd Miss Hodge – Miss Hodges brother was Arthur who was an anaesthetist and served in WWII in Middle East. 4th Mr Powell and Mr Sanderson, 5th Fitzgerald who died and Harry took over. 6th Mr Nelson who was new headmaster.

More photos shown- provided by Jill McKenny

1 Bill Dalyell wedding- John best man

2 Aunt of Bill Dalyell who graduated a doctor – an early women to do so.

3 Bills grandfather headstone in Wauchope

Bill Jack and Mary Gray

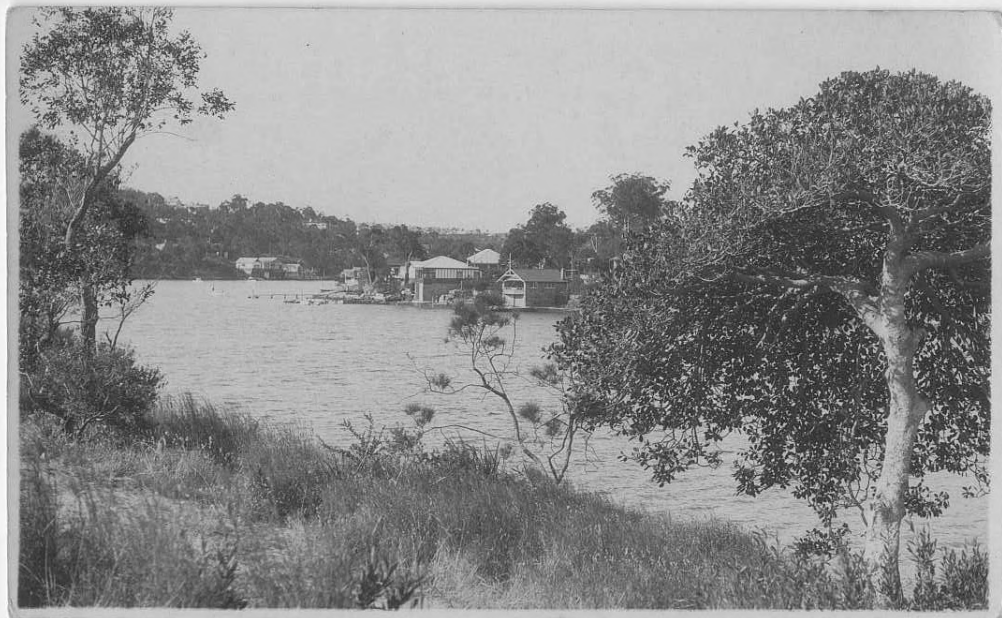
Appendix Photos from Grays











Oatley Bay



Corner
Russell
and
Annette
Streets



The section below are notes by John Whitbread from the day.

Jack Gray's talk at OHHS 30 May 2014

Jack was accompanied by his sister, Jill McKenny.

Their parents, Robert John (Big Jack), a bank manager with the Union Bank, and Berta Lydia (Bird) bought in to Oatley in 1921. They purchased:

- 38 and 38A Annette St with the existing houses (no knowledge of who the former owners were), and
- 36 Annette St with an existing boatshed and accommodation upstairs,
- 3 double blocks between Russell and Neville Sts (adjoining Annette St) on which they built 2 duplexes and a house in Russell St. Later changed to 6 blocks of land.
- They also owned the block of land that is now Annette Street. The council made them give this land back before they granted permission to build the duplexes.

They lived at 38 Annette St from 1921 to 1949, when both 38 and 38A Annette St were sold. Jack was born in 1919 and Jill in 1923. Jack's recollections of his days in Oatley are:

- There were fully enclosed baths on the waterfront at 38A,
- There was a mass of Christmas bush on the block which they sold at 3d a bunch at Hurstville Station,
- There was a boatshed built on a platform about 12 feet from the shoreline – with a wooden walkway and handrails, and a wooden ramp and winch made from wood,
- Jack built a VJ on the lawn and he was a founding member of the Connells Point Sailing Club,
- To get his driver's licence all he had to do was drive to the end of the street and back,
- They could walk across Oatley Bay at low tide,
- Mr Canning was the milkman and was related to the Bay Store Cannings,
- Mr Peisley delivered the bread and he would have lunch on the grass verge at the front of 38A. He put a sugar bag of chaff over the horses head while he had lunch,

- There were swimming races at the Pleasure Grounds on Sunday mornings,
- During the depression people would set up camp and sleep in the bush,
- Jack and Bill Dalziel made a diving helmet from a kerosene tin and used to explore along the bottom of the Woronora River. It had a lovely sandy bottom before the dam was built. The helmet was weighed down by a bag and rocks and air was supplied by a tyre valve attached to a foot pump, operated from the boat,
- Fletcher's boatshed used to help them make their boats – they steamed the timber to bend it to shape,
- Arthur Fletcher became religious and installed loud speakers on the waterfront, to broadcast weekly sermons. People complained and the police closed him down. He shot himself a few months later,
- The Ellis family lived at 40 Annette St,
- At the street end of 42 Annette was Mr Knight (with a limp). He was a bootmaker and used to mend their shoes. On the waterfront were Mr Hawke (no legs) and Mr Friend,
- A fellow used to rent the boatshed at 36 Annette and on weekends his mistress and he would stay there,
- The Chiswells rented 38A (until sometime in the 1930's) followed by the Thompsons who were there in 1938. The Thompsons bought 38A in 1949 from the Grays.

Other things they recalled about Oatley:

- There was a tennis court on the block in Rosa St where Rex Roberts's house stands,
- There was a Police Station next to the hotel, possibly where the car park is now,
- Mr and Mrs Brown ran the school shop before Mrs Milsop. The Browns used to make pea rolls.
- Mr Fitzgerald's cane was called "Johnny". He used to keep it down his back, and scratch his back with it.

Jill Gray worked as an air hostess and married a pilot, Col McKenny. He later had a real estate agency at Oatley Station, where the dentist is now. Later Jill worked with Edie Gillard at Sydney Hospital. Edie and Norm Gillard rented one of the duplexes in Russell Street before they bought 33A Annette St from Mr Jew of Rosa St in 1951.

Jill said that her mother's parents owned a hotel at Erskineville. It was built by their great grandparents. My guess is that is where the money came from to buy in Oatley.