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| August 1999 | Aspects of the Oatley Oyster Industry | Alec Leach |

POST WAR OYSTER FARMERS
AND
FAMILIES OF NEVERFAIL BAY
OATLEY

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Contributor: Alec Leach.

Neverfail Bay is situated at the end of Wyong Street, formally known as Cecil Street. The valley is nestled against the Illawarra railway line embankment and main pipeline from the Woronora Dam to the Penshurst Reservoir on the western side. On the eastern flank is a steep rise to Letitia, Algernon Streets and the general overall escarpment height of Oatley.



Wyong Street looking towards Neverfail Bay. 1999.

Since 1886 when the Derwents began, it has been active with Oyster Farming.

Bass and Flinders, together with boy Martin, are believed to have found fresh water from a spring at Neverfail Bay when they explored the Georges River in “Tom Thumb” in 1795.

This “Well” would have been in the vicinity of No. 50 Wyong Street, near where the Purification shed is today.



The Purification Shed nestled against the embankment near the pipeline.

Alas, another “Well” was drained with the development of the north western side of Wyong Street. The pool was skirted with blackberries and was opposite number 19 (James Derwent). The location would be difficult to find today.

To get an insight into the early history of the families, who settled there, their lives have been documented in numerous books that have been written on the suburb of Oatley. These include: **“OATLEY The working Man’s Paradise”**. by Elaine Howard.

“OATLEY In Early Days”. By Dr. D.J. Hatton.

“Oatley Writes”. A Souvenir Publication of Oatley’s 150th Anniversary.

“Pictorial Memories”, ST. GEORGE. Rockdale, Kogarah, Hurstville

By Joan Lawrence.

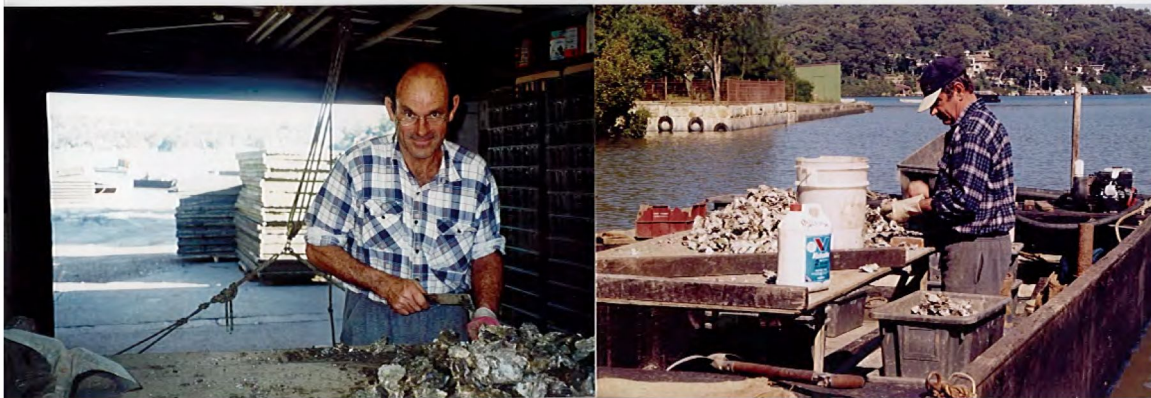
A South Coast historical publication called **“The Narrawallee Story Retold”**, by Alex McAndrew tells of Thomas Andrew Bins Derwent (Andy Derwent 1854-1940) in the early 1880’s, sailing a seventeen foot sailboat from the Georges River to Conjola Lake, which he found to be rich with fish and oysters. Apparently he left the boat there and walked back to Sydney. It is written in the book that he reached Hurstville on the fourth day. Robbie Derwent verified this story. Another feat that Andy Derwent accomplished together with his sons Jim and Bill (Andrew William) was to sail a boat from Shoalhaven Heads to Botany Heads in ten hours. They were caught in a southerly buster.

The Derwents still have interests in the Narrawallee, Milton, Ulladulla and Burrill Lake district.

This report will outline some of the people who have lived in Neverfail Bay in the post World War II period and capture the families who have been involved with Oysters.

Naturally the Derwent's is the first name that anyone connects with oysters and Oatley. However another family who has farmed Neverfail Bay since the early 1900's is the Drake's. Today's generation of Robert, Len and Ted inherited their gift of Oyster Farming from their grandfather, Tommy Thompson who was a boatbuilder. His first venture into the oysters was a lease from the mouth of the Woronora River up stream on the western shore. Since then oysters have well and truly entered the Drake families blood.

The Drake brothers father, Percy James began Oyster Farming after returning from World War II, where he served in a Tank Unit with the A.I.F. Robert, the elder of five children, began his career on the leases in 1955, followed by Len in 1959. Ted followed a couple of years later.



Len Drake.

Robert Drake.

Culling Oysters Neverfail Bay 1999.

The family home was situated at number 55 Wyong Street.

Len worked with Robert and his father for approximately six months before he and Robert decided to venture into a partnership. They worked new leases in Quibray Bay and on the northern shore at Lugarno.

After Len married they purchased the Reid property at number 50 Wyong Street. It is situated on the foreshore of Neverfail Bay.

During Robert and Len's partnership, there are some unforgettable gentlemen who worked for them.

Jack Young, Rod Tebbett, Jack Clinker and Adam Hitchen.

Robert together with Greg Geddes formed a partnership in 1980 However this ended when the disastrous QX (Queensland X) disease played havoc in the Georges River in 1996.

Ted left the industry and is now a shopkeeper at Maitland.

From a farming community of approximately thirty-three people in the mid fifties, only a handful remain today.

Len and Robert Drake.

Noel Derwent. Works in conjunction with Martin (Curly) Cerealey.

Roslyn and John Derwent.

Greg Bridge. with Adam Hitchen and Ken Castle assisting.

There have mainly been two families working the Oysters and of course the other family “The Derwents”, being the other major player.

Over the years father and sons worked together, listed are some of the partnerships.

1. Bluey (Bill) A.W. Derwent with sons Russell and Eric.
2. Noel with Glen (son of Eric) and Adam (son of Russell)
3. Les and Robbie with Clive (son of Les) and Les (son of Les)
4. Ron and Andy.
5. John.
6. Chicka.
7. John and John were trading as Derwent and Derwent.



No. 29 Wyong Street, the home of Lottie and John Derwent.

Sadly John senior of this partnership passed away on the 27th December 1996. John was born on the 14th January 1914 and lived at number 41 Wyong Street until he married Lottie at the age of twenty-six. They moved into number 29, where he lived until his death. John worked in a Solicitor’s office until the Depression. He then turned his attention to Oyster farming and was active in the industry until shortly before he passed away.

John was a life long member of St. Pauls Church of England and was a kind gentleman. The above information was taken from John’s Thanksgiving Service.

“Australian Rock Oysters” partnered by Roslyn and John carry on the family tradition.

To round off the farming fraternity was Albert James (Bertie) Bridges, whose son Greg is still Oyster Farming. Berties father, Edward James married Mary Jane Barr. The Dents and Jacka Roelandts had part time leases. Tom Davis although not living in Neverfail Bay worked the oysters from his home at 51 Ada Street and sold them from his van.

Apart from the Derwent's and the Drakes, there lived a close knit community in "Derwent Valley", Neverfail Bay. By the end of the 1940's most families living in the valley were related to a Derwent. Except for the Drakes. When talking with Len and Noel Derwent on this subject, I had the feeling I was talking to the Martin's and the Coy's. Although there is a faint relationship between the two families Robbie has enlightened me to this connection. The Drakes great, great grandfather's sister married Noel's great, great grandfather of the second marriage.

To be able to comprehend who of the Derwent families lived in Wyong Street after World War II, it has been decided to list some sort of family tree. Hopefully it will be complicated and no one will understand it.

I will start with Thomas Andrew Bins Derwent (Andy Derwent 1854-1940)

He had five children from his first marriage.

Dora.

Martha, later married George Edwards, Robbie Derwent's uncle.

Andrew William.

Charles, (Chub) whom I will call Charles No 1.

James.

There were four children from his second marriage to Polly Thompson.

Molly.

Thomas Andrew.

Jack.

Ethel.

To bring this into today's picture, I'll endeavour to break the families down a little more.

William Andrew Derwent (1882-1962) married Ellen (Nellie) Edwards (1879-1943)

The Edwards family still is in the Oyster industry on the Georges River and Botany Bay.

They had six children.

Mary.

Violet.

Ruby.

William Andrew. {Bill (Bluey)}

Les (Pud)

Robbie.

Charles William (ChubNo1.) Derwent. Married to Dorothy Monroe.

Children.

Charles William. (Chicka) No.2.

Noel.

Laurie.

Beryl.

Thomas Andrew (Darby) Derwent. Married to Grace James.
 Children.
 Ron. Now an Inn keeper in England.
 Valerie.
 Andrew.
 Joan.

James Derwent. Married Martha Fretus.
 Children.
 Maily.
 Pauline.
 Doreen.

Now that you understand the relationship of the Derwent family, I will endeavour to list where they lived in Wyong Street and slot the other families in their respective places. I will start from the northeastern side, being the uneven numbers. Work down to the bay and return on the other side of the street with the even numbers.

No.15. Morton: Robert and Ethol(Molly) (Molly from Andy's second marriage)

Children: Edna (Judy), Wendy, Jean, Ethol and Robert.

No.17. Mr. & Mrs. Rhue

No.19. Derwent. James, Martha

Children: Maily, Pauline & Doreen.

No.21. Walton. Brian.

No, 23, 25, Vacant.

No. 27. Ravensdales: Tom and Millie. (Tom was the J.P. for the valley)

Children: Doris and Ken.

No. 29. Derwent. John, Charlotte (Lottie)

Children: Prudence, Elizabeth and John.

No. 31. Bridge: Albert James (Bertie), Married Ruby Irene Derwent.

Children: Zelma and Greg.

No. 33. Prescott. Gay. Married Violet Derwent.

Daughter: Lorraine.

No.35. Vacant.

No.37. Shed occupied by Miss Wilson then Andy Campbell

No.39. Derwent. Charles William (Chicka No2) Married Elizabeth Derwent.

Children: Greta, Marjory, John, Charles, Dorothy & Evol. (Margaret)

No.41. Derwent. Charles William (No1 Chub) Married Dorothy Monroe.

Children: Charles William (Chicka), Noel, Laurie & Beryl.

No.43. Derwent. William Andrew (Bluey) Married Betty MacDougall.

Children: Eric, Helen, Phyllis and Russell.

No.45. Roelandts: Edward (Ted) Laura Kersten.

Children: John (Jacka), Esme (Meamie), Alick (John, Parrot) Frank (Fish), Emal (Pilge), Bernard (Bernie, Diddles), Leonard (Fatty), William (Mickey) Eileen (Sis) and Rayma. .

No.47.Derwent. Les (Pud), Married Doris Ravensdale

Children: Clive, Kerrie, Christine, Leslie, & Vicky.

No.49. Shearsby. Joe and Maude. Joe was the official School photographer.

No.51. Fields.

Rashbrook: Charles

Children: Don, Jack and Keith.

No.53.Williamson: Albert (Bushy)

Children: Deatrice, Joan,Albert, Marjorie, Phyllis
Reg, Iris and Barry.

No.55.Drake: Percy James married Rita Martin.

Children: Robert, Elaine, Len, Joy and Ted.

No.57.Vacant. Except a shed belonging to the Derwents. Half the block was reserved for a right of way to Letitia Street, where the Water Board's (Sydney Water) Pumping Station is now located.

No. 59. Derwent:Thomas Andrew (Darby) Married Grace James

Children: Ron, Valerie, Andrew & Joan.

No. 61. Thirlow. Harry.

Before returning up the other side, the Wards then Bamberries lived in a house where the Purification shed is today.

Now to continue on the western side of Wyong street with even numbers from Neverfail Bay, north.

No. 50. Reid.

Children: Annie & Miss Reid, Lizie. (Spinsters.)

Drake. Len Married Susan Byrne.

Children Tim & Samantha.

Second Marriage, Jan Boes.

No. 48. Sheather.

No. 46 Vacant (Part of the No. 44 estate.)

No.44. Tommy Thompson.

Mrs. Emery.

Finney. Stan.

Children: Elizabeth, Jennifer and Garry.

No.s 44 to 48. These blocks were used to make way for the Neverfail Place development, in the early 1970's. The rear portion of No.50. was also included.

No. 42. Derwent. Jack Married Dorothy

Children: Margo, Lynette,Patricia and John.

(Thomas Andrew Bins Derwent passed away here in 1940).

No.40. Vacant.

No. 38. Derwent. Andrew William. Married Ellen (Nellie) Edwards.

Children: Mary, Violet, Ruby, William Andrew {Bill (Bluey)}, Les (Pud) &Robbie.

No. 36. Rogers. Debs. Married Mary Derwent

Child: Ray.

No. 34 to 30. Vacant. This was used as a sand pit.

Albert (Bertie) Bridge's father. Edward James and mother Mary Jane Barr, lived where the sand pit once was.

No. 28. O'Brien: Mathew (Mat)

Children Martin and Owen.

O'Brien's were the proprietor's of the Petrol outlet, Wood, Coal and Coke yard in Letitia Street, where the Oatley Village Video is today.

No.26. James McRae: He was a relation of the McRea's estate in Penshurst.

Child Flora.

No. 24 Derwent: Robert (Robbie) married Betty Samuel.

Children: Karen and Robin.

No. 22 Hamill: Frank and Sylvia.

Children: Beverly and Gary.

No.20. Flint. Roy.



Robbie Derwent outside his house No. 24 Wyong Street.

Although it is not directly related as being Neverfail Bay and for that matter the people who lived there, oyster leases are the lifelines that keep the industry alive. To conclude this report I will mention most of the leases that the men of Neverfail Bay have worked over the years. They will begin at Quibray Bay, a Bay extending from Botany Bay and work up the Georges River to Lugarno.

Quibray Bay and Weeney Bay.

Jews Nose, a point protruding into Weeney Bay.

Towra Bay, opposite the old Mick Moylans Hotel.

Carters Island.

Woolooware Bay.

Gwawley Bay. (Now Sylvania Waters)

Oyster Bay.

Coronation Bay (known as Frogs Hollow)

Doubled Bay. (Carina and Scylla Bays, Como)

Neverfail Bay.

Mangrove Island. Mouth of the Woronora River(The Woni)

Hinches Point, the Woni.

Punches, Hurstville Bay on the southern bank of the Georges River opposite Jewfish Point.

Gungah Bay.

Lime Kiln Bay.

Today Neverfail Bay still has a charm about it. The urban rush appears to an outsider to have passed it by. I was talking to Len Drake in the early stages of this project, when we observed a fox appear to come from the end of Wyong Street. It hurtled out onto the mud flats, weaved its way between the barges and disappeared into the mangroves heading towards the pipeline. Magic.

Before concluding, it was pointed out to me by Doris Derwent, that at one time there were nine Mrs. Derwents in the valley. The postman had the problem solved if there was any doubt as to which Derwent the mail should be delivered. He would deliver it to the same household, who after duly reading the letter would make sure it was delivered correctly.

The Fisheries Licensing section had a bigger problem. With the number of Andrew Derwents holding Leases on the Georges River. I know the frustration they must have had in keeping their records straight. I've been tangled up with the Charles Chub's and Chickas in this report.

It was simplified by the following folk, my thanks for their time and patience.

Robert and Len Drake.

Robbie Derwent.

Doris Derwent and Bertie Bridge.

Rayma Papworth (Roelandts).

And for interesting snippets

Greg Geddes, Noel Derwent and Glen Stevens.



Doris Derwent and Albert(Bertie) Bridge. 1999.



Barge loaded with Oyster trays, Neverfail Bay. 1999.



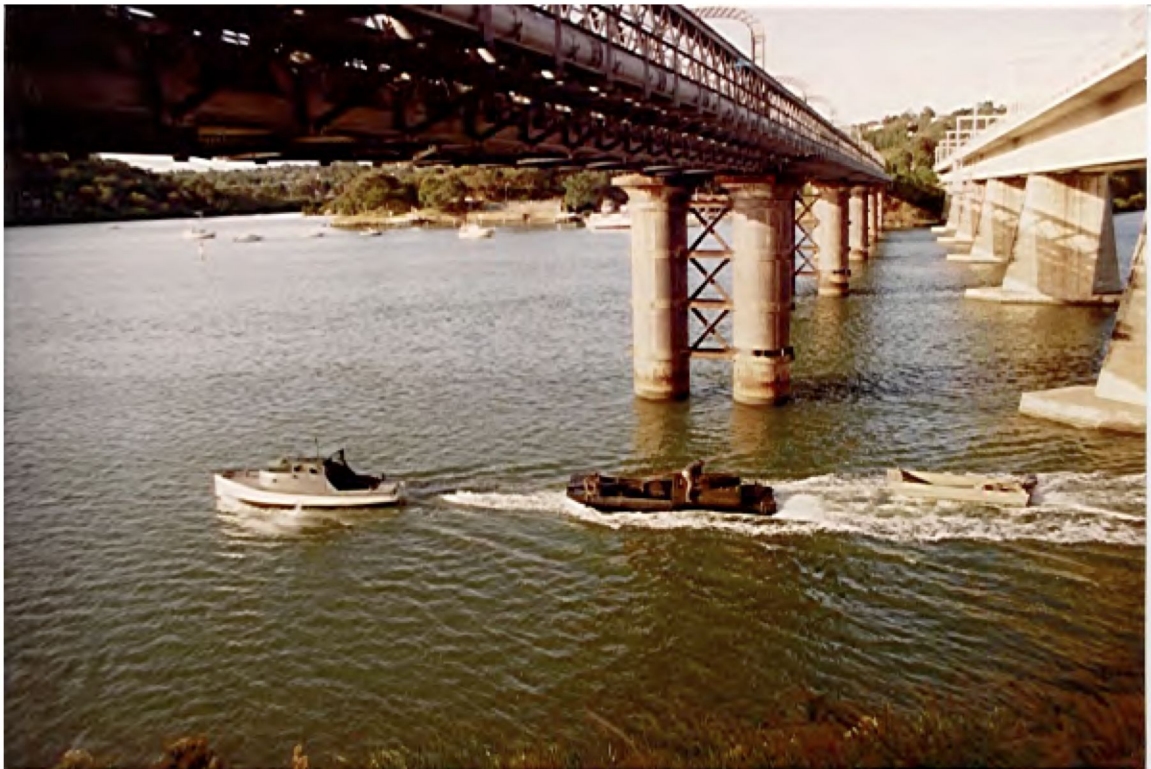
Robert Drake, Neverfail Bay. 1999.



**Low tide in Neverfail Bay, with "Kookaburra" laid up for a gearbox overhaul.
Year 1999**



Ted Drake. Neverfail Bay 1992



Barges returning from the upstream leases. Como Bridge. 1992.