

Butlers' Swamp

By Anne KIDD

Growing up at Butlers' Swamp was a kids' dream come true, but an adults time of hard work, going without and looking to where the next meal would come from. Looking back on my childhood I wish my sons and my Grandchildren could experience the life we had. Making cubby houses from branches, wading through thick black squishy mud to catch frogs, tadpoles and carp, getting leeches all over and then raiding the salt box to get them off.

My father Aeneas Leonard, my Mother Daphne, my sister Valma, my brothers Sydney ,Billy and I (Anne) lived with my Great Aunt Katherine Briggs on her property at the bottom of Gloucester St (then Council Ave.)My sister Iris was born when we still lived there. The property was bounded by Scotch College, the swamp and bushland leading up to what is now Alfred Rd. The property was owned by Katherine (Aunty Katy) who was known as a great horsewoman and the daughter of Annas Briggs (nee Atkinson). Annas Atkinson was the daughter of John Atkinson (Pensioner Guard) and his wife Ann. Annas was a midwife and a champion of the local Aborigines. The Bodney family lived up in the corner of the property and I remember going to Swanbourne Primary with Isobel Bodney, she also came to my birthday party. Melba Bodney (their mother) was a very caring woman and I remember her making sure her kids were well behaved.

The property had Quondong trees, blackberry bushes and lots of jonquils at the bottom of the block. We used to pick bunches of jonquils, load them into a cane pram and push the pram to the Flower shop at Karrakatta Cemetery and sell them for one penny a bunch. The money helped mum and dad out. A lot of the time Mum and Dad would have gone without to feed us kids but it is only on reflecting that this is obvious. Bread

and dripping still brings back fond memories and stale bread soaked in milk with sugar on it for breakfast was another. Melba Bodney used to come to ask for food sometimes and Mum never refused her.

Dad worked for the council and mum worked at home. Life was hard for them and it's only after growing up that I realise how hard it was. We had no power (kerosene lamps) tank water and wash days were huge for mum. First of all she had to boil the copper which was outside. Then all the boilable things went in. Anything else was hand washed on a scrubbing board over a tin tub. The clothes were hung on a line of wire stretched between two posts and the lines were held up by clothes props (forked poles sold by the aborigines).

Bath time was boil the copper first, carry in the tin bathtub and then line up for a bath. It was eldest first and as the water got cool hot water was added. The floor of the house was rammed white ant nest and mum cooked on a wood stove.

The toilet was what is referred to as an "Outdoor Dunny" which was a fair way from the house and had a wooden seat with a pan underneath. Newspaper was torn up and hung on a piece of string. There was a flap at the back where the pan could be pulled out, a hole dug and the contents buried. One of the "games" played by us kids was you waited until someone, usually an adult, went into the dunny, got a long piece of grass, lifted the flap and tickled whatever part of the anatomy was showing. Amidst suppressed giggles you ran as fast as you could before they came out looking for you but most of the time it meant a punishment of some kind but it was worth it depending on who you tickled.

We went barefoot to school (Swanbourne Primary) and walked back home for lunch, then back to school. After school our job was to collect kindling for the fire. This was a game really because most of the kindling was on Mr Seeds property (or so we convinced ourselves) which was at the back of the house. Mr Seed had a draught horse Bob and the game was to collect as much kindling as

you could before Bob saw you. He would come galloping towards us and it meant dive for the fence where there was no barbed wire. I'm sure it was as much a game for him as it was for us because he'd always stop short of the fence. Mrs Seed, Mr Seeds' mum was a gentle little lady and used to give us homemade butterscotch.

Sometimes the swamp would flood and the water would come right up to the house. My dads' family were horse breakers and I remember seeing dad breaking in a wild brumby. We could ride bareback but the stables had old saddles, horse collars and lots of other equipment but being a child it was just a place with special smells and visions.

The Claremont council resumed the property for public open space in 1952-53 and paid Katherine Briggs \$3000 (pounds). Family talk goes that the property was 26 acres. The property belonged to the Atkinsons' and passed on to my Great grandmother Annas by her father John.

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