

"Earlier Christchurch"

BY

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BRICKS :

When the settlers from the first four ships came over the Hills to the Plains, they, or a considerable number of them, camped on a site on the southern bank of the River Avon, near where the Barbadoes Street Bridge now is.

This settlement was called "The Bricks" and was so called because a boatload of bricks had been discharged there, and even a pile of bricks made a landmark in those days. The River was largely used at first for the conveyance of the settlers' heavier goods, and that was probably the reason for the selection of this site.

After a year or so at "The Bricks" the settlers moved out to the sections they purchased in various parts of the newly-laid-out town.

My people came to Cashel Street, to the spot where we now are, and my earliest memories date from here. Ours was at first a two-roomed lean-to, and most of the other houses were of the same modest dimensions.

You may imagine the houses did not interfere much with the surrounding view. That view was pretty much like that from the deck of a ship at sea - only a tussock plain instead of water.

When looking towards the Plains, two objects stood out conspicuously against the background of the mountains -

Riccarton Bush and the Papanui Bush. Riccarton Bush was preserved by its owners, Messrs. Deans Bros. from the first, but Papanui Bush, which was much smaller, was largely used for the settlers' needs in firewood and cut timber.

I can remember seeing a Saw Pit there with the men working in it. The exact site of the Papanui Bush is about the apex formed by the Harewood Road and the North Road.

STREETS:

No streets were formed - such traffic as there was, was carried on over the tussocks. Among my earliest recollections was the formation of Cashel Street.

A Gully (one of several included in the town site) ran from near St. Michael's Church to near the Bank of N.Z. and crossed Cashel Street at its intersection with Colombo Street. This Gully was a serious obstacle and the residents, without calling for Government or other assistance, turned out and filled in the Gully themselves.

I was very young at the time, but I turned out too, and worked until some man took my spade away and said I was only digging holes and not furthering the work. I cannot remember any metal on any of the streets at that time, but High Street was the main thoroughfare, being a continuation of the Ferry Road, and it

must have had metal of some sort.

Any description of our streets in the early days would be incomplete without reference to the Bullock Drays which were so frequently to be seen on them. Farmers from the surrounding district on certain days brought in their produce and took back their stores. Through the mud of winter time, no other conveyance was possible.

The teams generally consisted of about six to eight bullocks, but often more. They were often left with an indifferent watch when the driver was doing his business. Although as a rule quiet and even somnolent, sometimes the bullocks took a fancy for a run. They were not easily stopped, and it was a great joy to the youngsters when a team got away.

WATER LYING:

In the winter, a great deal of water lay in parts of the town site. One lake stretched from Mason Struthers' corner to Tuam Street and Manchester Street. Deep ditches were dug in various streets to relieve this condition.

Moorhouse Avenue and that part now occupied by the Roman Catholic Cathedral was swamp. Traffic was confined in these parts to small boys like myself who jumped from niggerhead to niggerhead on their lawful or unlawful occasions.

The said small boys peregrinated a good deal on stilts when the water was lying - not effeminate stilts with long shafts for handles, but stilts cut off and tied with flax to the leg below the knee - plenty of freedom of action then.

BRIDGES.

Bridges over the River were few. I think Victoria Street was the first, but Colombo Street Bridge was the one I remember best for over it came the Kaiapoi Coach daily. Perhaps it was so used because the Post Office was close to it, at or near the corner of Colombo and Chester Streets.

Another means of crossing the river was by fords. The principal ford was in Hereford Street, just above the Island which afterwards was the site of Inwood's Flour Mill.

Another near the Royal Hotel was called Fisher's Ford from Dr. Fisher who lived on Oxford Terrace nearby, and used it a great deal. Dr. Fisher's site, or a site close by, has been occupied by a Doctor ever since his day.

SCHOOLS.

My earliest recollection of going to school was through the tutu and fern of the now thickly built-on Triangle.

The first school was started by and was under the control of the Wesleyan Church. The school was in the Church itself, and its site was near where Petersen's now is.

A larger Church was built later a little further north in High Street. The Presbyterians later started a school which my brother and I attended. This was opposite the Hospital and it served for some years.

Later, the school building was taken bodily to the present West Christchurch School site and was towed there on wheels by the boys themselves.

Christ's College had its infancy on a site in Lichfield Street opposite St. Michael's. It was then known as the Grammar School.

Of the people I naturally remember best those with whom I came in contact. My father had his Smithy at the Eastern side of his section, while his dwelling was on the Western side.

Material for his work was very difficult to obtain, and I remember him telling us of one incident which is illustrative of the difficulties those early settlers had to face.

He required a bar of iron of a particular size for an urgent job. It was in Lyttelton, but the roads were impassable for wheel traffic. He walked over via the Bridle Path, got his iron and

walked back with it on his shoulder. The mud of the Ferry Road - deep, tenacious mud and miles of it - nearly conquered him, but at last he got home thoroughly exhausted, but with his iron.

I have often marvelled how my father managed to purchase, import and instal his first Steam Engine and Foundry Plant. I can remember the Boiler in particular, because it arrived late on a Saturday, and my brother John got inside it in his Sunday clothes early next day. His action was unfavourably criticised.

The first cast was the occasion of a function when all the notables came and speeches were made. It also brought out all the neighbours to watch the great blaze from the cupola, and the molten metal being run. This was in 1857, and the engine then started was in constant use until 1895.

WATER SUPPLY.

Those whose homes were near the river availed themselves of that clear cool stream, but those more remote dug wells. These were not very deep and they did not act as collectors of water, but as a means of tapping an underground stream. Looking down our well, which was close to where this building now stands, we could see the clear stream running at the bottom.

The first Mayor of Christchurch was Mr. Wm. Wilson - a man of

outstanding ability. He had held some position on Lord Ross' estate and was skilled in all matters relative to horticulture. His garden occupied the whole block bounded by Manchester, Cashel, Madras and Lichfield Streets, and it was, even in those early days, cultivated to its fullest extent.

Mr. Wilson married the eldest daughter of Mrs. Williams, who is also worthy of mention for the grit and determination she showed in very trying conditions. Her husband died suddenly on the Port Hills on his first journey from Lyttelton to the Plains, leaving his wife and large family to make their effort alone in the new land. This they did most successfully by starting a drapery establishment at the Market Place, as Victoria Square was called then.

Another close neighbour was Mr. Thacker, father of our present Mayor. Mr. Thacker's energies were devoted in the early days to running vessels up the Heathcote. Insurance for this dangerous trade could not be obtained, and Mr. Thacker sustained heavy losses, but on the other hand he made good profits.

His section was that now occupied by Turnbull & Jones in Cashel Street, and I remember how the deck houses and other parts of one of his wrecked steamers were brought up to his section and used for building.

A shoemaker occupied a cabin thus formed and did a good trade. Mr.

Thacker afterwards went to O'Kain's Bay where he had work in plenty for his plucky fighting spirit to tackle. He made good, as we all know.

Many others I could mention of that sturdy community. Fitzgerald who started the "Press" newspaper and drove about in a gig with tremendous wheels - fully twice as large as ordinary wheels.

Nabob Wilson - a man of great energy and courage. Bowen, Moorhouse, and many others whose names are written in our history.

The Heathcote River was much used by trading craft and often there were a dozen vessels at least at the various wharves. The highest wharf was a little upstream from Radley Bridge.

One vessel I remember seeing at one of the wharves was the "Rifleman", a three-masted schooner. She was the ship which was seized by Te Kooti at the Chatham and brought him and his gang back to New Zealand to perpetrate the Poverty Bay Massacres.

Communication with Lyttelton was, of course, of great importance. It was done variously. You could ride all the way, or you could walk all the way, or you could take coach to the foot of the Bridle Path and then walk over. The coach was ferried over the Heathcote by a punt.

Another way which was

used by those having luggage was by coach via Sumner. These coaches, of course, did not exist in the very early days, but were of later date. Lots of people have until recently motored over the Zig-zag and generally were a bit nervous on it. I wonder how they would have fancied going over it with a four-horse team driven by a man who took a pride in doing it in style - a few whiskeys as a rule added to the said style.

Coaches also ran to Kaiapoi and beyond. Kaiapoi was a great shipping port in those days. Another port further north was Saltwater Creek. This was also a busy place and boasted a large hotel as well as other buildings.

We had our amusements in the early days. A travelling conjuror named Jacobs gave us a first-rate show (in our Town Hall of many uses) and his performance would be considered good to-day.

Foley's circus also visited us, and the show was a source of great delight to the young fry of the day. The big tent was pitched on a vacant section close to the White Hart Hotel.

Our old Town Hall has often been cited as an example of the many uses to which one building can be put. It is within my experience to have attended Church there; entertainments, (such as Jacobs above-mentioned); Captain Wilson's exhibition of his mesmeric power; Bazaars, and a Supreme Court, where on one occasion a woman was tried for her life. The allegation was that she had poisoned her husband, a well-known man, but she got off.

These, Chairman, and fellow rotarians, are a few recollections that have occurred to me of the period of my childhood. If time allowed, no doubt I could add many more, and probably succeed in wearying you.

I thank you for the kind interest you have taken in my little talk.

Andrew Anderson.