

DRIVING NEWBOROUGH HISTORY

Norm Holyoak has lived in Newborough since he was eight years old. In January of 2011 he took a drive around parts of Newborough recalling the history of his time from 1950 onwards. These are some of his memories.

We begin in Monash Road. Here Norm can remember the ‘milk tree’ that was at the intersection of Monash Road and Old Sale Road where local residents would leave a billy hanging from the tree branches, with money in the billy for the milky to fill with fresh milk each morning. The Meadows family lived in the house now occupied by the Verhagens at No 101 Monash Road and they ran the baker’s business in Yallourn North. Further along on the south side, where the Bowling club now is, there was a general store set back in the trees. There was also a contractor’s camp. Workers came up from Melbourne and slept in tents and humpies. Norm can remember one of them coming to his mother and asking if she could supply them with cooked evening meals and packed lunches which she agreed to do. Turning north into Old Sale Road, Norm points out that this is not actually the original road. The original Old Sale Road was further east and when the new housing estates were formed in Newborough the old road was in the way. Originally it ran from the Newborough CFA station to the start of Coach Road where it intersects with Monash Road. So the authorities put in this new road that linked Old Sale Road with Monash Road as it is today. This required a house to be moved and this house is now located at 24 Thorpdale Street. To the right is the now vacant block where the Newborough East Primary School was located. Here Norm can remember the early days when the school yard turned to mud after rain and older students had to escort younger students to the toilet because their boots would get stuck in the mud. The house at the north east corner of the intersection of Old Sale Road and Gould Street was the police station. Official duties were in the front of the building and the back was the residence.

Crossing John Field Drive (which wasn’t there when Norm first arrived) there are the



Quonset huts on right hand side for storage of the pre-cut houses imported from England. These were located on the town square on Boolarra Avenue.

recreation grounds on the right. Here Norm can remember a large tent or marquee which had a wooden floor and was used to hold the first services for the Church of England and Sunday School classes held in the back of a panel van on the same site. There was a pig farm in the area at the time. Later a church was built on the corner of Thorseby Street and Southwell Avenue on block No 36. This building was used until the church moved to Torres Street where St Aidans is now located.

At the intersection of Old Sale Road and Southwell Avenue there is the CFA station but this was not the first one. The original CFA shed is still standing on the south west corner block at Ellinbank Street and 21 Boolarra Avenue. It is a corrugated iron shed in which the first fire truck, a new OB Bedford, was parked, having been provided by the SEC. The foreman in charge of building houses was housed on this block and was in charge of the fire truck. Norm can remember his father being a member of the brigade. Ellinbank Street was one street that had houses down both sides at the time.

Travelling along Boolarra Avenue we arrive at the shopping centre area opposite the old Yallourn Medical Clinic. Here on the parkland, Norm can remember three huge Quonset huts in which crates holding house loads of timber, shipped out from England, were stored until they were opened up to begin construction. He clearly remembers that Yellow Express was the company that delivered them and Coventry Climax forklifts shifted them into the huts. Another large Nissan hut was in Woreen Street across from the park. When it was first built, Norm can remember crawling inside on the dirt floor and there was a D8 dozer inside. Later the SEC handed the building over to the community and it became a theatre and could hold 400 people. The local carpenters put in a wooden floor with material supplied by the SEC.

The shops were not there until later. The RSL and the medical clinic were not there. The original clinic was located in a house at No 6 Woreen Street. It would have operated there until the new building opened up. Andy Todd ran a corner store opposite the park. The people from the store at the Bowling Club site moved into a shop here and it later became a bakery. Purvis Stores built a shop here further along – the last shop in the current block which is now a Foodworks store. Norm believes that this area never really took off as a shopping area. These smaller shopping centres created in the midst of the Housing Commission houses became less successful as people became more mobile.

We now arrive at No 15 Mirboo Street where Norm lived with his family when they first moved to their own house. For the first six weeks they were put up in a Housing Commission home in Rossmore Avenue in Yallourn North. Davine then brought them to their new home in Newborough in a J bar Ford semi. When they arrived there was no made road, no footpath, no toilet and no fences. Norm had only seen one dirt toilet in his entire life. It was May and it was a wet year which made things worse. The truck got bogged four times before reaching the house. The first thing Norm's father did was make a sled on which they could tow the fire



New houses built in Childers Street Newborough. Original Newborough East Primary School site on left.

wood. Any wheeled vehicle just got bogged. To make things worse, all the top soil had been bulldozed to the northern end of Delburn and Mirboo Street and was in a huge pile about 30 foot high, leaving the houses in a sea of sticky clay. It was a total shambles. It was to be a couple of years before the street construction was completed and roads and footpaths appeared.

Norm can remember a truck bringing the one toilet in the street to their house and this was shared with four other houses until their own toilets arrived. Family members queued for the toilet each morning. The image they had been presented at Australia House in London was nothing like the situation they now found themselves in. Back in England they had a double story semi-detached home with a footpath and bitumised road out the front, sewerage and regular bus services. As Norm points out, any wonder that Poms put in this situation would whinge – they had plenty to complain about when comparing what was offered with what was actually provided.

Much later, after Norm was married, he lived in the family home with his wife Fay and did back yard work servicing Volkswagen vehicles. At this time the Newborough streets were still not yet constructed. For example, Thorpdale Street houses were not built yet.

Norm first went to school in Yallourn and a bus would pick him at the corner of Ellinbank Street and Monash Road. The bus came from Fumina South, an AB Bedford, usually heavily overloaded with passengers. If the bus came over the rise along Monash Road and flashed his lights it was a sign for the boys to grab a bucket and go into the house on the corner and fill the bucket with water. The driver reckoned the bus was running too hot. When the bus stopped the boys popped open the cowling to access the radiator, removed the cap and filled up the radiator, the driver never getting out of his seat. Then the Newborough East School was built. By the time Norm reached high school age, Moe High had been built so he went there for two years and then to Yallourn for the last two years.

The SEC had employed Norm's father as a foreman to build the homes that were built in Nottingham. His father had been taken to the factory to see how it was done and prepare him for the job. On arrival in Melbourne Norm's father was surprised by an offer from a member of the Railway's Department to actually switch jobs to them and build the same style houses that the railways were putting up around the state. However, being true to his word, he rejected the offer and remained with the SEC. But after building only about 12 homes, the SEC contracted out the work and Norm's father was given another job with the SEC. These first homes were in Childers Street The houses had a box built into the back wall which was used as a bread box but this was not the purpose in the original design. It was put there to house a gas meter.

Sandy Creek runs to the east of this area of Newborough and in the 1950's was used as a swimming hole at the crossing of Coach Road. At that time there was a concrete causeway, not a bridge as it is now.

On the Bowling Club site there was an office that serviced the Housing Commission homes where people could ask for jobs to be done on their homes and complete other related business. It has now completely gone. The rent for their home was automatically deducted from their pay.

It was an amazing time in the history of Newborough, seeing large areas of bush came down, streets go in and houses go up. All the time provision of amenities and services like education, medical clinics, transport, made roads, footpaths and sewerage all struggling to keep up with demand. For many, they felt duped, for others something to endure while they established new lives. What they had been told in England was not always quite what they saw when they arrived.