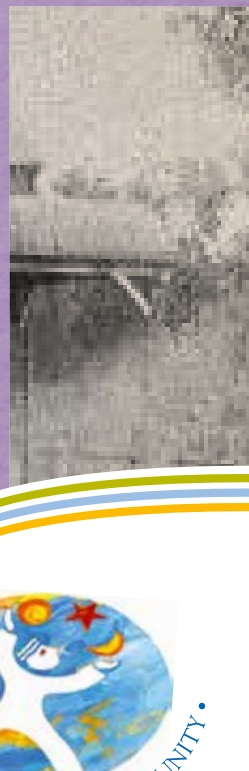
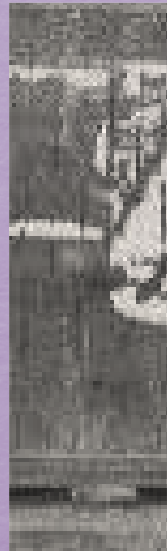




Local Voices: Tales of Life in Belmont



I remember when...

In 2013 the City of Belmont invited Belmont Pioneers to contribute some of their memories of the district's past. The following are just a few of the many fascinating reminiscences the City received.



Doreen Ahrens seated on front bedroom foundations: 1950

In 1956, owing to heavy rainfall, we were flooded with water completely surrounding our home. I had to tie a rope around my small son's waist and the other end to a back verandah post so he did not go into the water and drown. There was no drainage in those days.

Mrs Doreen Ahrens (b. 1926)

I remember the Rivervale School and Belmont School went to Point Walter on the small river boats for school picnics. The Red Castle Brewery made casks of ginger beer and the local bakery made rolls for lunch. A Mr Gordon, who lived at the top of Orrong Road and who worked for Plaistowe's, supplied the lollies. I remember it was a great day outing, the boat ride from The Springs jetty to Point Walter jetty and home again.

Mrs Nellie Westlake (b. 1919)

When I started school in Carlisle I used to walk through a bush track. In the winter it was fun because, as you may imagine, it was well and truly flooded out. It was a very swampy area in those days.

Mrs Faye Baxter (b. 1941)

My first day at Belmont Primary School, June 1954. I was not able to speak one word of English. In Italy we had to wear shoes at school, but on my arrival at the Belmont school many children did not wear shoes. I also clearly remember the original weatherboard classrooms, which were demolished in 1956 or 1957. And there was the free milk every day.

Mr Giuseppe Brizzi (b. 1946)

After we'd been swimming, they'd have the races at Ascot and we would go up to there and after the last race, when the crowd cleared they would let all the kids in. We could go to the stalls and get half a bottle of lemonade or pies or sandwiches that were left and they would give them to us. That's the way it was.

Wally Shepherd (b. 1928)

Moving from Vic Park to work on the Metro Buses, I met my husband, so we moved to Stanton Road, Belmont, where the old RAAF barracks were at Dunreath, later used for immigrants. From Stanton Road I moved to Orrong Road, which used to be all poultry farms, and not much else except for the wild rabbits and the cows loose in the area.

Mrs June Allbeury (b. 1930)

We always had full tummies. We were lucky that my mum and dad always managed to have a few chooks. We managed to grow a bit of – dad always grew some vegies and things. The scheme water did come down past our place eventually so that helped. Dad had a nice bit of garden there.

Rose Shepherd (b. 1930)



*Wedding party of Rose Marie and Lewis Walter Shepherd
15 December 1951*

Dunreath Hostel was on the spot where the bridge now crosses Tonkin Highway. We lived in army barracks, with six couples separated only by blankets hanging from above. The food at Dunreath wasn't very good and there wasn't enough of it. By the time I got back to the camp in the evening the kitchen had closed I missed out on the food so we had to make sure we always had a bit of bread around.

Ms Maria Milewski (b. 1924)

My husband and I started to build our home in 1953-54 with bricks from Maylands on permit. My husband did the plans and submitted them to the Shire of Belmont. He built the home over a period of time, and it was completed in 1956. He was also a cabinet maker, which is how we came by our home sweet home, and first four legged friend: Tuti.

Ms Elsa Wezdenko (b. 1924)

Everyone called her 'Mum'

My family moved from the Goldfields to Welshpool in 1911. Shortly afterwards my father died unexpectedly and my mother bought a newsagency and confectionary shop, which included a Post Office and State Savings Bank agency, in Guildford Road (Great Eastern Highway), near the corner of Griffiths Street, Rivervale.

Nearly all the boys came to the shop after they had grown up. My mother was known as 'Mum' to them, and they told her all their troubles.

Papers were first delivered by mother in a horse and sulky with the help of one boy, from the Rivervale railway line to the Belmont/Guildford boundary.

When I had to deliver papers on foot from the shop, home was either through the bush or sometimes I would get a ride, bareback, on one of Dave Lawson's trotters. What roads were made did not go very far beyond Guildford Road, so the horses had to be ridden through the bush to the scattered houses.

Most social activities in the district took place between the Rivervale railway line and the Belmont Hall. Fetes were held in the garden of H. Duncan's home, and dances were held in the Belmont and South Belmont Halls.

Most of the area outside of this was taken up with racing stables, piggeries, poultry farms and dairies in Belmont Avenue. Cattle and sheep were driven from Midland to Robbs Jetty along Guildford Road. When this took place, everyone was given warning and all shops had to close their doors until the mob had passed by.

Henry Milne (1983)



Mrs Milne's shop Newsagents and Stationer: 1915



Henry Milne, Roy Henderson, and Percy Oliver, with coach, J. Wells: 1935



Towton Family: c.1910

A Belmont life

I was born during 1906, in a little three-room timber house in Belgravia Street, Belmont. My father owned a bakery on the corner of Hargrave Street and Great Eastern Highway. He employed a baker and delivered the bread himself. The baker liked the bottle a fair bit and often when my father came to collect the bread for delivery he'd find the baker drunk and the bread burnt.

I attended the Burswood (Rivervale) State School. Every year, I can remember, we had a school picnic at the zoo and we always went there by boat. We had free ice cream and sweets and held a sports programme with prizes for the winners of the various events.

After I passed sixth grade at Burswood School, I went to Perth Technical School and passed my seventh and eighth standards. I was then fifteen years old.

My first job was with L. H. Deague & Co., electrical engineers, as an office and messenger boy. I worked 48 hours per week and took home seven shillings and sixpence at the end of the week. After twelve months at my first job I was taken on as an apprentice and eventually served five years.

When I completed my apprenticeship, I left Deague's to start my own business. I had twenty pounds and a push bike at the start of my business venture. That was in 1928.

When the Depression came, there was no work to be had, so I went to the Swan Valley to pick grapes. Later on I was making cement bricks. After the Depression lifted, I started my business again and also got married, that being in 1936.

The first doctor in Burswood was Dr Butterworth who came in 1947, and had his surgery near Surrey Road.



Gold Star Liquor Store, Rivervale. To the right is W.G. O'Mara, Electrical Contractors, 4 Great Eastern Highway, Rivervale: 1960s

The first dentist was my brother-in-law, Len Percy, who attended at a house owned by Mr Birch next to the Riversdale Hall.

There was no direct banking business in Rivervale until 1947, when the Bank of New South Wales opened an agency in my shop beside the corner store in Orrong Road. The Bank would send a clerk out from Perth for two hours a day.

I was elected as a member of the Belmont Park Roads Board from 1937 to 1940, and during this time, after much opposition, I managed to get

passed a resolution that houses in the district should be numbered and street signs should be erected.

In 1940, I joined the RAAF, serving until 1945. Then later I was the foundation member of the Rotary Club and of the Bowling Club.

In 1977, the Shire of Belmont presented me with the Community Service Award.

William O'Mara (1983)

Mosquitoes, cows and an unusual task



Wilson family; Frank, Arthur, Harold, Jean

My parents, together with my two younger brothers and sister, moved from Highgate to Belmont in 1917 when I was eight years old.

Our first home was a large wooden structure in Mathieson Road, on the corner of Epsom Avenue. At the rear of the house, facing Epsom Avenue, were stables known as Yule Stables.

I guess the main differences between Perth and Belmont were the little things like straying cows, race horses, the mosquitoes and the bushland. I never knew what a mosquito was until I came to Belmont, and then it didn't take long to find out.

My first job after school was to get dry cow manure, which we burnt in kerosene tins and allowed the smoke to drift throughout the house. This appeared to be the best known method of coping with mosquitoes, apart from rubbing citronella on the unprotected parts of the body.

In our spare time we would gather scrap iron, tins, bottles and broken glass. Most kids had a home-made billy cart and we stored the collected items in a shed.

Gardening was part of our school work. We would spend at least half a day per week growing vegetables, most of which were taken home by the teachers and the rest sold at our bazaars. This was all part of our war effort.

Most houses in Belmont had stables on their property and ours was no exception. I became interested in racing at a very early age. A gang of us kids would gather on the railway station and, if you could climb, you would get a good view of the races.

It was also easy to climb onto the 'gents' and I saw my first Perth Cup from there. It was the 1919 cup when Eurythmic dead heated with Rivose. There was also a large tree near the mile post that gave a very good view, but it wasn't the easiest of trees to climb.

Climbing trees became my undoing in 1920. My brother and I always kept the home stocked with firewood. I used to climb the trees and chop down the dry boughs. On this occasion I remember climbing a large tree near Durban Street. The next thing I remember was Mrs Alderson standing over me telling me to lie still.

The ambulance driver must have given me a needle as the next thing I remember was waking

up in the Children's Hospital. I found out much later that the doctors had suggested that my shattered leg should be removed but my father had refused this. I was bed ridden for seven to eight months. All I could do was read comics and books and listen to gramophone records.

Frank Wilson (1983)

A cow adventure

The cow was on heat and mum said there is a farmer across the highway. He had a bull there. I had to take the cow to the bull.

Well, I am walking her along the road through Central Avenue here and she could smell the bull,

you see. She took off and of course the highway is there and there is traffic there and I'm sort of hanging onto this stupid cow!

Of course she is throwing her head around and this chain is coming off and I'm trying to wrap this chain around her. It was the only way I could hold her back was having this chain around her horns. She was bolting across the highway.

Then when I got her there the bull was mounting the fence and she's up on the fence. I was a tiny child. I sort of think, can you imagine asking a twelve or fourteen year old to do that now?

Rasma Rusling (b. 1947)



Vera Liepa drinking from a cow: 1969



Home of Harry and Edna Bellis in Clarke Street, built 1934

Before there were roads



After living in the Bayswater district for some time, my husband and I decided, in the early 1930s, to take up land in South Belmont and start a poultry farm.

We selected a ten-acre block in Clarke Street, off the end of Belmont Avenue. Clarke Street was only a sand track and in the summer time the sand was from 8 to 10 inches deep and hot.

My husband cleared a track onto our block and erected a tent from where he started to build up a farm. The suppliers of materials would not come off the gravel road at the end of Belmont Avenue, so my husband carried bags of cement and lime, and other necessities, on his back to our property, three blocks in.

When we complained to the Roads Board, Mr Rowe, a member of the Board, told him: "What are you growling about? You knew it was like that when you bought the block." Nevertheless, after a year or so, we got a portion of the road built through which helped a lot.

We made enough bricks to build a 44 by 20 feet shed. This was to be a house for the chickens, but until we made enough bricks for a four-roomed house for ourselves, we lived in this shed which we made very comfortable for the time being.

After six months heavy work, we built our home with verandahs all the way round. It was the pride of South Belmont for many years. As time went on we built eight sheds of the same size as the first and housed hundreds of poultry.

When we talked of getting electricity through to our property, people said we were mad and none of the neighbours would back us. Eventually the State Electricity Commission saw it our way and put it through to the property. Then, of course, all the neighbours took advantage of the service.

We put down a bore with the electric motor, bought an electric cutter to cut down our lucerne and maize, and we were the first people in the district to own a refrigerator. I used to make a lot of ice cream, and the children passing by on their way home from school would often call in for an ice cream treat.

After having a seven days a week job for many years we decided to sell the farm and built a new brick home in Belmont Avenue. We bought several blocks of land which were divided into yards and racing stables and then my husband trained many racehorses and winners. That was in 1944.

Life was much easier and better there. We had a bus service every couple of hours, past the door, and a telephone.

Edna Bellis (1981)



Bellis poultry farm, maize grown on property

I remember...

Handwritten signature



Children in fancy costume

I started at Rivervale Primary School in 1932 and went through to the sixth grade by 1938, then on to Perth Girls in East Perth and later to Modern School. I must have been an oddity, for I loved school!

Walking to Rivervale Primary School along a bush track, which is now Salisbury Road, picking wildflowers on our way. The hundreds of cowslips that grew where our house now stands.

I remember gathering vivid green Christmas beetles in the bush next to the school grounds.

We'd store these beetles in an empty tin and later release them in our classroom. Our teacher, Mrs Vaughan, used to stand on a raised platform and our class had hardly started when the green specks started to appear, first onto the platform, then eventually on the teacher's legs.

Mrs Simmon's general store, with the smell of barrels and bags of produce, the jars of sweets and the Christmas gifts sent each year with our orders. My parents shopped there and so did I for many years after my marriage.

My sister Mary and I coming home from school along Great Eastern Highway and trying hard to sneak past Mrs White's house. Mrs White, although a nice lady, was deaf and used an ear trumpet. We didn't particularly like having to talk down this trumpet—hence two little girls who would avoid catching her eye and who felt very guilty about it later.

The horse stables in Kooyong Road and at the top of Fitzroy Road, and the lovely horse that for some

*phone number into your
get me fine & never
me over a jacket chain*

reason had to be shot right on the track we walked to school along, and the many tears shed for the horse.

The fancy dress balls that the Rivervale Primary School used to hold in the old Belmont Hall. The fun of the grand parade and doing the folk dances afterwards. We used to have sets of four boys and four girls dressed up as Romans, fairies and elves and other characters.

The iceman who, if we were good, might give us a chip when he delivered the blocks of ice for Mum's ice chest.

Learning to swim at the Springs and being able to drink the fresh water from the actual springs, after which the area was known. On hot days the climb back up the hill which often left us sandy and hot and in need of more swimming, not school lessons.

Being entrusted in sixth standard to walk from school, catching the train to Perth and attending the domestic science classes at Perth Girls School. And oh! those irons, not just great banks of flat irons, but also those special ones for doing ruffles and edgings. Woe betide if we scorched anything. Then picking up the Women's Mirror magazine for Mum at Mrs Milne's shop on the way home and being first to read the Phantom comic.

School picnics at the Zoo, and all the excitement weeks before and especially on the day, Kegs of ginger beer, the running races, prizes and eventually the bus journey home.

Norma Mingham (née Clark)



Swimming in the river at Belmont: 1931



Sunday School picnic at Zoo

From Beer to Keer Weer

My father was Donald Curtis and at one time he owned the Red Castle Brewery which was originally the 'Swallow Aerated Waters' factory.

Father also owned a lot of land in Belmont, including a six acre piggery in Abernethy Road, and the service station and shop on the corner of Belmont Avenue and Great Eastern Highway, known as 'California Markets'.

In 1927 father purchased the large house known as 'Hill 60' from Madam Heaney, a Perth milliner. We lived in this house for seven years. I understand that Madam Heaney had structural alterations done to the house to accommodate the special furniture she imported from Italy. Most of the magnificent pieces were sold to my father with the rest of the furniture in the house.

Father had little to no formal schooling, owing to a bad eye infection when still very young, and although he could not read or write, he had an uncanny sense for values and ability to calculate. His eyes gave him problems throughout his life and in 1934 it was suggested he go to Germany for an operation for his failing eyesight. Consequently our home was sold to the Sisters of St. John.

We returned to Belmont in 1935. 'Keer Weer' was built for us in 1934 by Mr St. Quintin, and named after a New Zealand race horse. This home was near the previous one being situated between 'Hill 60' and Hardey Park.

Father also had an interest in horses and won the 1927 WA Derby with a horse named Hint. He also won the Northam Cup one year with Grey Label, a horse named after the whisky brand for which Dad had an agency.

In later years 'Keer Weer' was also passed on to the Sisters of St. John.

Mrs Harris (née Curtis)



Red Castle Brewery, Great Eastern Highway



View of tennis court from balcony of Hill 60

Plank roads and floods

My parents, George and Olive Rowlands, moved into the Belmont district in 1920, taking up ten acres at the corner of Belgravia, Gabriel and Fisher Streets. In winter the bottom portion of our land was underwater, and my sisters, brothers and I had many fun-filled hours paddling our home-made canoes around looking for the nests of dab chicks and other swamp birds.

My father worked in the city as a truck driver for J & W Bateman. In the 1920s it was not necessary to be tested for a drivers licence. Instead he was given instructions in the morning and in the afternoon was sent out with a loaded truck to make deliveries.

In these early days many of Belmont's roads were not constructed and instead were just sandy tracks. Fulham being one of the few constructed for a short distance from Belmont Avenue, which was itself just a plank road for many years and was subject to flooding from the numerous swamps in the area. In winter it was necessary to wade through the floods in at least two places on our way to school.

Our school was South Belmont Primary, and consisted of only two rooms. In all there were about sixty pupils in the school. The school picnic held at Point Walter was a highlight of the year, with South Belmont combining with Rivervale Primary for the outing.

There were no shops near our school until Mrs Wilson, who lived opposite in Belmont Avenue, opened up her front room as a shop. The children used to flock over there in the recess and were able to buy a bag full of broken biscuits, sweets or ice cream, all for a penny.

Looking around South Belmont today it is difficult to imagine how it was in earlier days.

D. Burton (née Rowlands)



Belmont Avenue: 1920s

From Grove Farm and back

My mother and my stepfather lived at the old house known as Grove Farm for some time from about 1919-20. I was nursing at a private hospital, but spent most of my off duty time with my parents in Belmont.

Only the ground floor rooms were occupied as the upper floor was not considered safe due to deterioration of the building.

I remember going to Grove Farm on one visit to find a houseful of warm and friendly Belmont residents celebrating a house warming party for us. It was there that I met Charles Grenville Courtland whom I married in 1922.

Grove Farm has now gone, but many years before we lived there, Mr Divine (what a heavenly name!) ran a dairy on the property, and earlier still I believe prisoners were detained there. The cell blocks had been demolished by our time but we found huge keys that had been used to 'lock them up'.

After living in Epsom Avenue, we built our home in Hehir Street, opposite St Anne's Church. After the death of my husband in 1976, our house was sold. It was demolished, with all of its memories, and replaced with a commercial building.

I guess I started with memories of Grove Farm but I have wandered slightly. I still remember the joys and sorrows since I first lived in Belmont more than sixty years ago.

Alice Courtland (née Wordsworth), 1984



Charles Grenville Courtland & Alice Muriel Wordsworth: 25 July 1922

References

p. 3: Milne, Henry, 'Some Early Memories of Rivervale', *Looking Back* (Belmont Historical Society, 1983)

pp. 4-5: O'Mara, William, 'My Life in Belmont', *Looking Back* (Belmont Historical Society, 1983)

pp. 6-7: Wilson, Frank, 'Belmont as it was', *Looking Back* (Belmont Historical Society, 1983); Interview with interview with Vera Liepa and Rasma Rusling (2013, copy held by City of Belmont Museum)

pp. 8-9: Bellis, Edna, 'Early Days in South Belmont—1930s', *Looking Back* (Belmont Historical Society, 1983)

pp.10-11: Mingham, Norma, 'Memories of...', *Memories of Belmont* (Belmont Historical Society, 1986)

p. 12: Harris, [Mrs], 'Donald Curtis', *Memories of Belmont*, Vol. 2, (Belmont Historical Society, 1987)

p. 13: Burton, D., 'South Belmont in the 1920s and 1930s', *Memories of Belmont*, Vol. 2, (Belmont Historical Society, 1987)

p. 14: Courtland, Alice, 'I Lived at Grove Farm', *Memories of Belmont*, Vol. 2, (Belmont Historical Society, 1987)

Images (in order as shown in book)

p. 2: Doreen Ahrens: Image courtesy of Mrs Ahrens
Wedding party of Rose Marie and Lewis Walter Shepherd
15 December 1951

p. 3: Mrs Milne's shop: City of Belmont M0092-01;
Swimmers: City of Belmont M0155-01

pp. 4-5: Towton Family: City of Belmont M005-01;
O'Mara's: State Library of Western Australia 212267PD

pp. 6-7: Wilson family: City of Belmont M0103-02; Vera
Liepa: Photo courtesy of Mrs Leipa

pp. 8-9: Bellis home: City of Belmont M0185-01; Bellis
farm: City of Belmont M0185-06

pp. 10-11: Children in fancy costume: City of Belmont
M0303-01; Swimming: City of Belmont M0223-01;
Sunday School Picnic: City of Belmont M001-01

p. 12: Red Castle Brewery: City of Belmont M0135-01;
View of tennis court from Hill 60 balcony: City of Belmont
M0101-01

p. 13: Belmont Avenue: City of Belmont M0243-01

p. 14: Wedding photograph: City of Belmont M0127-04

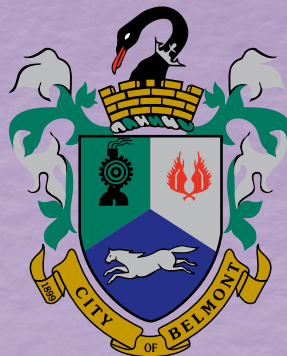
Front Cover Images (top and bottom)

Bellis home: City of Belmont M0185-01

Mrs Milne's shop: City of Belmont M0092-01

Back Cover Image

Swimming: City of Belmont M0223-01;



Each part of the coat of arms symbolises an aspect of the City of Belmont. The kiln and stack represent brick making and the cog is a symbol for industry. The wings symbolise flight and the airport, while the horse is the racing industry. The green stands for public space; silver, the sky; and blue is the Swan River. The black swan is the State emblem, and the ducal coronet around its neck symbolises Belmont's relationship to WA.

For further information on the City of Belmont Heritage Series, please contact the Belmont Museum on 9477 7450 or email museum@belmont.wa.gov.au or visit 61 Elizabeth Street, Belmont WA 6104

