TRANSCRIPT

Interviewee : Veronica Phillips (Ma)

Interviewer: Heather Rooney

Subject of Interview : A Woman growing up in the Hunter.

Date: 23 August. 1987.

TRANSCRIPT

- HR "Hi Ma! It's Heather. How are you?"
- VP "Who ?"

- #R "It's Heather."
- VP "Oh, hello darling. How are you?"
- HR "I'm fine. I've come out today to record you're life story."
- VP "Eh! that's nice darling.How's the family?"
- HR "They're really well."
- VP "...Where's Catherine, Heather?"
- HR "She's at work today. And so is Nigel and John."
- VP "Ah, I thought she would be out with the horse love."
- HR "Yes, well she will be at the weekend."
- v P "Ahh."
- #R "It's looking nice she's getting it ready for the show."
- γρ "Ahh, that's lovely , she's going to be interested in horses just like I was."
- HR "Yes, you were a great horsewoman in your early days Ma."
- VP "Ahh, yes darling I was a very well known horsewoman."
- "Well Ma, I wanted to talk about your life, it's been such an interesting one, and you're 105."
- VP "Yes, that's what they tell me, 105."
- HR "We had a big party for you."
- VP "Did you darling?"
- #R "Yes, do you remember?"
- VP "I remember, 105 is a good age Heather."
- HR "Yes we had all the family here, the television channel 10 and channel 3."
- VP "Wasn't that lovely of them."
- HR "Yeah, and tell me Ma, you were born in Scone?"

- VP "Yes. I was born in Scone, yes I was."
- HR "1884 ?"
- VP "Yes, that seems a lifetime ago darling, doesn't ?"
- #R "Yes, a couple of lifetimes really !"
- VP "Yes. Yes."
- #R "And you had brothers and sisters ?"
- "Yes I did. I had three sisters and one brother, I had. I was the eldest. I had brother Jack, he was the second eldest. Olive she was the very beautiful woman. Then there was Mary, Nellie, Ellen yes yes, I did I loved them all very much."
- #R "You had a lovely childhood."
- v
 ho "Well we were very poor darling, but we were all very loved."
- #R "I can remember, you telling me about your father being a horse trainer."
- VP "Yes, he was many things, in those days, you were many things. He used to tell us the story about when he rode the mail, when he was a young boy in the area. He used to deliver the mail on horseback, and he had a very good friend that he had grown up with from a baby. It was Jimmy Jimmy the blackfella, and Jimmy rode everywhere with grandfather when they delivered the mail. He protected him, and they camped on the riverbanks together. He tells us the story about getting to the fork in the road this day and Jimmy Jimmy said, 'There's another rider boss,' and there was another rider in the fork of the road, and they pulled up beside him and he said , Can you point me in the direction of ... ', and he mentioned some homesteads name, and Jimmy Jimmy said 'that place he burnt down a long time ago boss.' And with that Dad tells us the rider and the horse disappeared. Ah, very interesting stories Heather. In those days Dad used to tell us about when he grew up, married mother. He had a little store in Scone. He was a shoemaker, and he had a little general store, and great man making bridles and shoeing horses, and he worked on the council for a lot of years Heather. A very well known identity in Scone, was Dad."
- #R "And your name was Harper, your maiden name was Harper."
- VP "Yes. Veronica Harper."
- HR "Did you have a middle name ?"
- vp "No, no , no middle name just Veronica Harper. Dad used to say, 'Harper by name, and Harper by nature.'"

- #R "And why was that, why didn't you have a middle name?"
- VP "We were too poor darling.No, Mother did'nt believe in middle names."
- #R "And you went to the Catholic School, St. Joseph's in Scone."
- VP "Yes, oh did I? Yes I did."
- #R "The nuns taught you the piano?"
- "They did, they were very hard ladies. They many the cane I got across the back of the hand. Many the flogging with the cane for riding the horse astroddle, instead of side-saddle. Oh, oh young ladies just didn't do that in those days, and many the cruel flogging the nuns gave me for being caught out for doing that one, and jumping the horse across the fences."
- #R "And you had sisters who used to do dressmaking?"
- "Yes, beautiful dressmakers. Nell in particular, you're Aunty Nell. Heather, she was the beautiful dressmaker, and Mother. And all the society people would come from Sydney, and all over the country by train and their carriages with their magnificent material and their beading to have these stunning evening gowns made for their weddings and trosseaus in silk and oh just very well known seamstress was Nell."
- #R " And you put on beads, and sequins and..."
- ${\it VP}$ "Oh goodness yes, on their handbags and on their gloves. Would cover their trains and their veils out of the most beautiful imported laces."
- #R "You always wore hats and gloves in those days?"
- "Oh dear me Heather, you wouldn't be seen out of the house without your hat or without your gloves. It just wasn't the done thing in those days. You never, never left the house without your hat and gloves, and they never left the house when they were pregnant neither."

(laughter)

- VP "How are you darling? Are you feeling well?"
- #R "I'm fine Ma. Tell me about when you used to make puddings."
- VP (cough) "What was that?"
- #R "When you used to make puddings."
- VP "Did I? Oh yes."

- #R "You made your first pudding..."
- VP "I did. When I was a little girl only 8 years old, and Dad made a stool, so I could reach the table, mix the pudding." (laughter)
- #R "When you used to play music at all the social functions."
- VP "Oh, I was very sought after I was. I was not only beautiful Heather, I was talented. I had my own orchestra when I was 18 years of age, very much sought after for my contralto singing voice and I learnt the violin too darling remember?"
- #R "Yes I remember, and you used to tell us about the picnics."
- YP "Yes, the picnics on the river bank, when we used to take the bag of lemons because we couldn't afford anything else." (laughter)
- HR "And you had a lot of cattle ?"
- VP "Well not when I was a young girl Dad never had any cattle. A milking cow and a couple of goats. When I got married we bought our own dairy property."
- #R "And Ma, how did you keep up with the goings and comings of the rest of the world, in that little valley, Scone?"
- VP "Well, well, newspapers very sought after. We had them sent in from Sydney, and Scone had their own two newspapers you know, and we were always kept well abreast of the news. When father shifted back down to Newcastle, trained horses trotting horses, very well know trainer and rider, was my father Harry."
- #R "And tell me about the great drought, in 1898, that hit Scone and the Hunter."
- VP "When was that darling?"
- HR "1898."
- VP "Was I married then?"
- HR "No."
- "Oh no, of course not! That was very sad. Scone was a very well known dairy area in those days, and with the coming of the great drought probably extended over six to eight years. The dairy herds died and the magnificent horse studs, all the cattle, and the devastation and the drying up of the water holes. Oh the poverty, it was just terrible, and many people left the area, and shifted they had to to survive Heather, and dairying died in the area and..."

- "And it was a great time for you young women politically then, at the turn of the century."
- VP "Oh goodness yes, yes that was the time of the suffragettes Oh, I was right up with that Heather."
- HR "Were you Ma?"
- "Yes. Yes I was, I wanted the vote for women, and you know Heather, Australia led, was one of the leaders of the women gaining the vote."
- HR "Yes."
- "And I was one of the leaders of the leaders in the Scone area to try and get the vote for women. Many women were too afraid to say they wanted the vote. Some of the husbands were tyrants in those days. But they were so excited, and delighted about it, but there always was the featherheaded ones, that did what they were told to."
- HR "And then you met Steve when he was..."
- VP "Yes, at a football match. Father and Mother took us back to relatives in Scone for a holiday, and here was this handsome young man , playing football, and that was your grandfather Steven."
- HR "And in 1904 you were married in the Sacred Heart Church in Hamilton."
- "I was. My gown was made by myself, my mother, and sister. And I went for my honeymoon in a horse and sulky. I went back to Muswellbrook. The Phillips, my husbands Steven Phillips family owned the Shamrock Hotel. Grandfather Phillips was a very stern man, and we went from there onto our own dairy property, Spring Creek. It wasn't very well thought of by the family. I can tell you. You see they didn't believe that you worked with your hands. They believed you worked with your collar and tie, and in those days it wasn't very acceptable to be working with your hands. And of course, Steven was the first one to do so we became outcasts of the family."
- HR "And then Ma, there were very exiting things happening in the world. Can you remember any?"
- VP "When the turn of the century?"
- HR "No, after more moving along then 1914,1912."
- νρ "How old would I have been then Heather?"
- HR "In your twenties."

- VP "Well I would have been let me see. Yes, one of the things that comes to mind would have been the sinking of the unsinkable 'Titanic'. Do you know about that darling?"
- HR "Yes."
- Vρ (coughs) "Excuse me. Yeah, well this wonderful big ship sets out from somewhere and all the aristocracy and very well to do people from Europe with all their beautiful furs and jewellery, and it was struck by an iceberg, and sunk somewhere overseas. Ah, big to do world news, very sad."
- #R "And about that time, the First World War."
- "Yes.Yes I remember that well, all the youths were that enthusiastic to go to war. And the boys under sixteen put their ages up and the men over forty put their ages down, and most of the women thought it was that they could get to France, just to be with those Parisian women. Steven didn't, he wasn't game! He didn't go to the war, he had a broken leg and limped badly and they would't accept him. All the young boys used to train in old Bakerwells paddock. He used to be an old tyrant, he was. Used to be at the foot of the Scone mountain, and all the fellows down from the country used to come there and train, and they all wanted to be in the Light Horse Brigade they didn't want to be foot sloggers they all fancied themselves these mountain men astride a magnificent horse. All very romantic, but it wasn't all very sad, because a lot of our beautiful young men, never came home again."
- #R "I remember you telling us about your sister who was Queen of the Float in the war effort."
- "Yes. It should have been me actually, but I was married so it was Olive. I was just as beautiful as Olive but I was married so Olive got the opportunity to be Queen of the Float. We raised a lot of money for the troops and the soldiers, I'm not quite sure of whom we gave it to."
- #R "To the Red Cross."
- VP " Oh, was it darling?"
- #R " Mm, you played at the dances."
- " My goodness I did and the men looked very handsome in their uniforms and their plumes and I used to get sixpence for playing at the dances Heather. You could get a lovely piece of material for dresses in those days for sixpence you know love."
- HR " And how many children did you have Ma ?"
- V ρ " Ah three. There was Ronald James, he really should have been

James Ronald, but Olive when she registered him refused to have him called after the Phillips so she reversed his name but he was always known as Jim. Then there was Mercia, she was born ten or twelve years after Jim, and then their was Jack. He was the baby , he was born two years after Mercia and a great mistake I don't mind telling you too!"

#R "Then in the 1930's, The Great Depression. What happened in your life then ?"

VP " Oh, they were very bad times darling, was..."

HR " Living at Weston."

" I was. Was that when I went to Queensland to work on the cattle station, to put Mercia through college?"

HR "Yes."

"Oh, well work was very hard to come by. Times were very hard and I went to Queensland with Steven and worked on a cattle station as a shearer's cook, and he worked as a rouseabout."

#R "I remember you telling me you used to make loaves of bread."

VP "Yes."

#R " In big brick ovens ?"

"Twenty eight loaves of bread, every second day. Oh hard work Heather, and we used to slaughter lambs, and we'd cook two whole lambs for breakfast. Ah they were hard days Heather. We came from there, that was up outside of Doronbomdy in Queensland and Jim was with us, he worked with his father. No he didn't, he was married, no, yes, he was married, he was'nt with us. Oh, Audrey his daughter was born then when Steve and I, yes went away, and when when we came back we, Mercia came out of finishing school, and Jack came home from Gatton, and we came back to Cessnock, and we prospered for a while and then..."

HR " It was the Second World War then."

" I think Cessnock was the beginning of the bad depression, and worked in a hotel as a cook and I used to bring the food home darling, every night so that my family was able to eat. We were poor but we had each other, and we survived and everyone shared, and we got through it. (coughs)

HR " And the Second World War, and you got through that."

vp "Yes, yes."

HR " And then, what sports did you like to play Ma?"

- VP "Tennis, and I liked driving a car. You know I was the first women ever to drive a car in the Hunter Valley, and boy oh boy didn't I give it a what for."
- "And you enjoyed bowls in late life ?"
- "I did. I didn't start bowls until I was nearly eighty. And I played up until I was almost a hundred. And very interesting sport and I enjoyed it. I met some very nice people when you play sport. Do you play any sports, darling?"
- "Yes I enjoy golf mostly. And Catherine with her horseriding. Tell us about the bullock teams Ma, speaking about animals."
- "When we had the property at Scone on the Spring Creek, we VP didn't own a bullock team. But there was good timber on the land and the bullock teams and the the timber cutters used to come in and we'd sell them the trees sixpence each, and they'd chop them down and take them away with these big bullock teams, and there was always water on the Spring Creek, because the water used to come from under the ground. Even when all the rest of the area was bone dry there was still a trickle coming through the creek. We used to carry the water to wash and we had old scrubbing boards. I can remember my mother we to go to church on a Sunday, and my sisters used to have a different dress on every Sunday, except the family knew, we used to get coloured starches in those days and mother used to wash out the starch the coloured starch. One Sunday and it would be pink and she would restarch it next Sunday, and it would be blue and she would restarch it again, and it would be green, and oh dear me. But on the first Sunday of every month we were always in our lovely crisp white starched dresses, and mother used to bleach all the colour out of them with lemon juice salt, and the sunshine. Now Heather."
- "Speaking about your mother, Mrs. Harper, you always told us about how she had this boarding house, and was well known."
- VP "Mother was well known. In all the wars they recommended the boys, when you go back you go and stay at Mrs. Harper's boarding house. Yes, my word she worked hard Heather, died a young women through overwork, hard we all worked hard in those days. There was no social service back in those days Heather."
- VP "Ah yes. Well you know you're grandfather was..."
- HR "Great grandfather."
- "Yes, you know he shod Thunderbolt's horse. This handsome young fellow, came in and handed the reins over to

VP Grandfather, and said, 'Shoe my horse son.' So he left and he went into the tavern, and that was the Shamrock Hotel. And he

came back, and he said, 'Are you finished the horse boy?' Grandfather said, 'Yes sir' he said, flicking a coin in the air and jumping astride the horse, and the horse rearing its head in the air he called out, 'When the troopers arrives son tell them, you've just shod Thunderbolt's horse.'"

HR "You remember that story Heather?"

"Yes, you've told me it to me many times."

"Yes, it was true, many a time he shod the bushranger's horse."

"I'm just trying to think of some more things Ma that you'd HR like to remember. How are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling very well. I remember some of the old stories. $V\rho$ Heather, where do you live now darling?"

HR "I'm still in Adamstown Heights."

"Oh yes, do you remember that house ? I pointed you out, when you where a little girl at Speers Point where none of the cattle would stay after dark."

HR "Yes."

"Well, remember I told you we went to live in this house, and you Uncle Jim used to say there was a man on the ceiling with no clothes on."

(laughter)

"Well we found out that none of the dogs or none of the animals or the horses would stop around the homestead at night. And it was a very eerie place, and we found out it was haunted, and we moved away from there from real quick. I got to tell you real quick."

" I can remember you telling me how you used to play the piano for the silent movies at Cardiff."

"Yes. Yes. They were great fun they were when the horses would gallop by you would gallop the piano along, and then all the romantic scenes you'd play something lovely romantic. Oh it was a shame when the talkies came, all the silent movie days finished then.

HR "And you used to come down by horse and sulky from Weston."

VP "Yes I did."

- "You told me once about when you were returning to Weston, in your horse and sulky that the horse shied at a piece of paper."
- "Yes under the viaduct , fancy you remembering you that !"
- HR "Yes, and you lost your bamboo bangle."
- YP "I did, did you ever find that Heather?"
- HR "No, Ma, no that was a long time ago."
- VP "Oh, oh well ."
- HR "So you've had a very interesting life, it's now 105 years down the track ."
- VP "Yes I ..."
- HR "You've got lot of grand and great great grand children ."
- "Yes darling, so they tell me. I have had an interesting life Heather. I've had from a horse and dray and to see the landing on the moon and to see all the wonderful vehicles they ride around in nowadays and the aeroplanes. I've had a very interesting and a very good and healthy life."
- HR "And what do you attribute it all to Ma ?"
- "Hard work, and a active mind darling, and the will to live and get on with it."
- HR "And a loving family."
- νρ "Always, and particularly my daughter Mercia, your mother."
- #R "Your great mate."
- "Without her I would never had lived past 80, she's cared for me and loved me all of her life, and there's not a better daughter ever lived or breathed then Mercia."
- HR "I'll agree to that."
- #R "I'll let you go back to sleep now Ma."
- HRVP "Thanks darling. Can I have a drink of water please?"
- HR "Yes, and well , thank you for reminiscing with me."

HEATHER ROONEY
THURS. 10-12 noon.
31 -8 -89.

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY - OPEN FOUNDATION REGIONAL HISTORY ASSIGNMENT.

The town of Scone was laid out in 1837, but the small village of Scone did not spring to life until the 1860's when the railway lines expanded like steel ribbons reaching further up into the Hunter Valley. Progress came quickly as teams of workmen pitched calico tents and bark huts on the previously quiet pastoral land. River flats and desirable agricultural land were sought after by investors. The black soil of the area was covered in wonderful trees, such as yellow box, apple, ironbark and gum trees. As a result of the railway a good deal of building activity began. Private homes, new business houses, a police lockup and a school were erected. Plans for a hospital and school of arts were drawn up.

A plentiful water supply was pumped up from Kingdom Ponds which rarely dried up, and was of great importance to the town. In drought times the water was sold for one shilling and sixpence per one hundred gallons. Water in one way or another has always been a problem in Scone. "Statistics show that about 12% of the Upper Hunter's annual rainfall is due to floods." Just before the end of the nineteenth century disaster struck when heavy rain occured. The Hunter River rose to a record level of 14.1 metres. Many such floods have followed, but the major one came in 1955, when the Hunter River rose to the record height of 14.27 metres. It submerged thousands of hectares of land destroying fences, roads, bridges, and livestock, thus isolating Scone. An early map in 1914 states that the" Road from Scone to Pages Creek 51 miles, 29 river crossings and 1 bridge". One would have to be a fit swimmer to attempt that journey, but improvements were gradually made.

Thirty six miles from Scone in the 1800's silver was discovered. Mines were set up and bullock teams carted the ore. Gold was also being found. Prospectors flocked to the new fields from distant places. During the years of the gold rush around Scone there have been many hotels established. The long slow bullock teams played an important role in the transport of both ore and equipment to the fields. However the permanence of the reefs were not realised and many disappointed miners joined other rushes.

The church played a large role in the lives of the pioneers of Scone. As well as having spiritual and moral leadership, the gathering together

^{1.} N. Gray, The Young Historians, Scone, 1979, pg. 39.

^{2.} N. Gray, Thomas Cook of Turanville, Scone, 1977, pg.21.

^{3.} Gray, The Young..., p. 33.

^{4.} M. Simpson, Pioneers of a Great Valley, Newcastle, 1978, pg. 67.

N. Gray, Wilfred Green of Gundy and the stories he told, Scone, 1978, pp. 56-59.

of the congregation on Sunday was eagerly awaited, especially if friends were coming in from the bush. The church also contributed to the cultural enjoyment of life. The choirs were trained and the piano and organ taught. The Sisters at the local convent were involved in the education of the areas children. They also were involved in the teaching of arts and crafts, including drawing and painting. Civic pride and community awareness grew as the population of Scone and its surrounding district increased.

One of the hazards that faced the Scone people was the prickly pear. When the railway lines were being constructed a few clumps were noticed in the paddocks. Fifteen years later, most landholders faced a problem more devastating than drought. The prickly pear had grown taller than a man and it was so thick it choked the paddocks. Fortunes were spent cutting, crushing and burningit. The full extent of this problem can be seen by the amount of money spent by wealthy landowner, Thomas Cook. It was "estimated that he spent not less than 25,000 pounds clearing Turanville of the pear and keeping it clean."

The spreading lands formed fine grazing paddocks for sheep, cattle, and especially horses. The Hunter Valley was renowned for its horses from the earliest years of settlement. Horses that were bred in this area for work in the steep mountains were blessed with stamina, surefootedness, and superior intelligence. Without horses of this quality the cattle industry could never have been established with any hope of success. The enormous demand for horses of any kind during the gold rush era resulted in haphazard breeding throughout the area. Blood horses and pedigreed stallions finally won out, and today Scone is well known for its thoroughbred horse studs. It is worth noting that the first Australian woman to be registered as a racehorse trainer was Betty Lawler from Scone.

Aborigines lived in and around the Scone area, and many were employed as stockmen and trackers on local stations. Some had been brought up in missions while others lived in the bush. They were clever at tracking stock which would stray over rough terrain whilst settlers were building fences. They

^{6.} Ibid,pp. 68-69.

^{7.} Gray, Thomas...,p. 23.

^{8.} Ibid, p. 24.

^{9.} K. & R. Farrell, Scone in Focus, Quirindi, 1982.

became expert riders and some were well known identities, such as "Yellow Bob, Jimmy Crimp, Tommy Clark, Walter and Jack Sergeant..." Indeed these Aboriginal stockmen," had a share in the development of the Upper Hunter," and "capabilities won for them the respect of their fellows."

The earliest postal service in the Scone area was by horseback. They were brave men travelling to lonely farms and stations. Bushrangers were around then and plundered the gold escorts for easy money. One of the most notorious was Captain Thunderbolt. He bailed up mail coaches, inns and all kinds of people travelling around the countryside. However, "he did not use his gun to kill or wound anyone in his six years on the road." To many" the bushranger was known as a fine man."

Other travellers on the bush roads around Scone were hawkers. At many of the lonely homesteads in the bush they were welcome by the womenfolk. Their visits enabled them to purchase clothing, haberdashery and many assorted goods. They mostly travelled in wagons generally with a watchdog running beside the horses.

Indeed Scone has changed considerably since the early years of Veronica Phillips childhood. Farming and agriculture play a less dominant role in the community. The development of industry such as coal mining has led to population growth. Scone is now one of the leading districts in Australia for the breeding of thoroughbred horses. The area is also known for its vineyards and fine wines. Scone now boasts of its modern hospital, airport and many other facilities. However several fine buildings and monuments still remain us of our heritage of the past.

to remind

^{10.} Gray, Wilfred..., p. 37.

^{11.} Tbid.

^{12.} Simpson, Pioneers...,p. 42.

^{13.} Ibid.

^{14.} Gray, Wilfred...,p. 60.

¹⁵ L. Evans, Complete Book of Australian Wine, Sydney, 1984, pg. 82.

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HEATHER ROONEY
THURSDAY 10-12 noon

AUSTRALIAN HISTORY-

OPEN FOUNDATION

SUMMARY

SUMMARY

I feel it was a tremendous experience for me to have been able to reminisce with Ma about her life. Although there were difficulties experienced while interviewing Veronica Phillips, who is 105 years old and resides at the Sandgate Nursing home. It was a worthwhile experience to talk for thirty minutes about some of the happenings in her 105 years. It made me more aware of how much things have changed. The world wasn't in a hurry then. Travelling was a slow business with horse drawn vehicles jolting along the dusty roads. I was taken aback when Ma said "she was the first woman in the Hunter to drive a motor car ." But I guess there aren't many around who could dispute her.

Horses played a big role in their lives, and riding side—saddle, as was the custom up to the First World War, seemed to get her into trouble, when she did the opposite. Sport might have been dominated by the male sex back in the early 1900's but tennis was acceptable as a healthy recreation for women. There were no champions amongst the Scone players, and no wonder, their mode of dress, must have slowed up the game considerably. The skirts were made up of five and a half yards of material. I can now appreciate the simpler and more relaxed style of dressing.

The nostalgic way in which she spoke of the elegant dresses of the times. The decorated, beribboned, beaded and sewn with minute rossettes of satin. We may be sure her and

her sisters shone in colonial society. I can appreciate the long hours of needlework involved on the very fine materials such as georgette, chiffon or Japanese silk. The pride in the finshed article was apparent.

The townsfolk's reaction to the news of World War 1 was strange. A tragic event involving the major countries of the world, with effects upon millions of people for years to come. There was a feeling of elation, of tremendous excitement rather than of fear, shock and horror when war broke out in Europe in 1914. They learnt of other distasters abroamd through newspapers mostly. For example the townspeople were stunned and unbelieving when news of the sinking of the Titanic came in 1912.

They were certainly the trailblazers, living through experiences like getting the vote for women in Australia. The arrival of the telephone and electricity to the area and as she remarked still around to see the first man walk on the moon. It was a time of the unsung wives and mothers, facing intolerable hardships in a harsh sunscorched land. It was no easy life and by today's standards their pleasures were simple.

Mostly their families were large, in an age that knew nothing of the Pill or the permissive society. Family pride, fierce loyalty and lots of love abounded. Music in all forms played a big part in their lives and how skilled she must have been to play the piano for the silent movies. The

things they did, and the people they were are now forgotten, strangers to a new generation, but well worth remembering.