

REGIONAL HISTORY

THE HISTORY OF E.H. BLATCHFORD IN NEWCASTLE

by

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OPEN FOUNDATION/AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

LECTURER: Mrs. M. Henry

CLASS: Wednesday night, 7-9p.m.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

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SUMMARY OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH  
DORIS BLATCHFORD

INTERVIEWER: MLADEN LAZIC, O.F.C., AUSTRALIAN HISTORY, 1989.

Doris Blatchford (nee Buchanan) was born on 30th May, 1913 at Wallsend, where she lived until aged 20 years. She met her husband, Eric Blatchford in 1931, to whom she had four children. The first two boys, Don and Ross, were born two years apart, and two years later Bruce and Warren (twins) were born. Warren died five days after birth.

Mr. Blatchford had a strong ambition to have his own business, which materialized in 1931 at age 20 years. He opened his first business, a small bakehouse, in his mother's lounge room, which was registered by the Health Department. Mr. Blatchford then received help from his cousin Iris, who agreed to walk around Cardiff taking orders for double sponges. Subsequently the first Blatchford shop was started.

Mrs. Blatchford helped out in the business until the children were born. She spent the majority of her future years raising the children until they became teenagers.

Blatchfords Pies was established at the height of the Depression. Prior to this they were able to save enough money, while using their parents' lounge room as a bakehouse, to open a shop in New Lambton. They rented the premises from Mrs. Silver.

The first shop was established at 182 Beaumont Street, Hamilton. It provided a bakehouse and a counter for selling the produce, which was cakes and sponges. The Depression in the 1930's didn't affect the Blatchfords to a great extent. The customers always shopped in the area where they lived, and in this way the Blatchfords were able to make an adequate profit. Wages were very small, and people were willing to work as jobs were scarce, and this was one way to survive.

About this time Eric Blatchford experimented with making pies, which proved to be a success. To-day the pies are well known for their variety and high quality.

Mr. Les Davies (now deceased) operated a wholesale business which involved the delivery of goods by horse and cart to various retail outlets in Newcastle and the Upper Hunter region. The Blatchfords utilized this means of delivery, which was unique at that time. This gave the business a new outlook.

The Second World War proved beneficial to the Blatchfords. They were the single suppliers of products to three major factories in Newcastle. They were B.H.P., Goninans and Lysaghts. The only problem confronting the business was that petrol for large vehicles was unavailable. Mr. Blatchford promptly fitted the vehicles with natural gas, which caused a propulsion momentum and made it possible for the deliveries to continue.

Eventually the family's business progressed and four more shops were opened in the Newcastle region.

In 1968 Eric Blatchford died at the age of 57 years. The business was inherited by Doris Blatchford who then formed the company "Blatchfords Pty. Ltd.", the title by which it is known to-day.

The only shop in operation to-day is at 145 Beaumont Street, Hamilton, which is wholly owned by Bruce and Ross Blatchford.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW

Mrs. Blatchford: I am Doris Blatchford, nee Buchanan, born 30th May, 1913 at Wallsend. I lived at Wallsend with my father, mother, two sisters and a brother. My father worked at the mine in Wallsend as an ostler. I can only associate him with a horse. He rode to work, rode home at the end of the day. My brother was the only one of the family who rode horses.

The pit closed down as it either ran out of cash or coal, I'm not sure. My father and other miners formed a company and decided to begin their own mine called Mt. Morgan. My mother was a religious person - Baptist - a very happy person and an exceptional cook, very friendly, loved by all.

By this time I turned 20 years.

Interviewer: When did you first meet your husband Eric?

Mrs. Blatchford: I met Eric at a dance. He played the banjo in the band and we made friends. To myself I said, "He's the one for me". When we went to country towns with the band I demonstrated a special dance with a local partner. Eric learned to play saxophone, clarinet, also taught himself to play a piano.

From the age of 13 he had been taking art lessons, oil painting. Eric's mother hung at least eight finished paintings in her lounge room.

Interviewer: When did Eric decide to commence his own business?

Mrs. Blatchford: He was about 20 years old when he began to be interested in starting a business.

Interviewer: How did you get involved in the business?

Mrs. Blatchford: When Eric was taken to hospital with appendicitis we had just begun a small registered bakehouse in his mother's lounge room, and I worked in the vicinity of their home so I became used to things like sponges, cakes, shortbread, tarts being made. I was more or less forced to take over for him until he came out of hospital. I gave up my job.

Interviewer: Where did you open your first shop?

Mrs. Blatchford: The actual shop was at 145 Beaumont Street, Hamilton. A small shop at New Lambton closed down due to lack of interest by Mrs. Silva. She was owner of the shop which we rented. Other shops were in Islington; Hunter Street, Newcastle; Blue Room Coffee Shop, Wolfe Street, Newcastle.

Interviewer: What year was the first shop opened?

Mrs. Blatchford: The Beaumont Street shop was the first shop opened with a bakehouse behind the shop - 1931-1932. A very wise old friend in business told us, "Look after the pennies; the pounds look after themselves."

Interviewer: Did you find much opposition in the pastry-cook business in those early years?

Mrs. Blatchford: No. All the other pastrycooks were in



other suburbs. People at that time did not have cars so most businesses could handle without competition.

Interviewer: What effect did the Depression have on your business?

Mrs. Blatchford: Never really worried us. We knew it was there but just kept working. Wages were very small. Price of small cakes was 1 shilling per dozen. When they went up to 1 shilling 3 pence I was surprised they still sold. We had not made pies so Eric thought he would try them out. They sold well.

A Mr. Les Davies (decd.) was a wholesale business, going to different shops around Newcastle and the Hunter, which gave us a new look, as the only people who went around in horse and carts (closed in) were drivers belonging to Newcastle Co-op. Store.

Jobs at that time were very short. Water Board began the Grahamstown water reserve with men unable to get work - somewhere around Raymond Terrace.

During the Depression most people tried to share whatever they had, from their garden or whatever. My mother came from the (Motto Farm) country - I think still in Raymond Terrace - so she would milk a cow (her own) and then share it around with my sister Daisy and me delivering it.

My father and several other men had a shack on Ash Island so they went fishing for a week at a time. Whatever they caught and brought home was shared with everybody, sometimes fish and prawns. When there was plenty of fish they exchanged fish for meat as a change when they were fishing.

My father kept the shack tidy and the pot boiling ready for the men.

Interviewer: With the Depression over, another event was to change the world (Second World War). What effect did it have on your business?

Mrs. Blatchford: Everything boomed, plenty of work. We employed at one time 28 people.

Housing was very difficult to find.

Rations were set up for food, clothing, petrol.

Blackouts were regular. Street lights were out.

B.H.P. and all other works were working full time.

We supplied pies, sausage rolls, cream buns, finger buns and several other lines to most of the works.

Even women were able to get work in the heavy industries, and did a great job.

I was married and had a son, Don.

When the Japanese came down the east coast of Australia (NSW) they bombarded Newcastle - the area around Nobbys and the street near the tram terminus.

Interviewer: The war caused petrol to become unavailable. How did you operate without it?

Mrs. Blatchford: The Newcastle Gas Company had bags of natural gas which were placed on top of cars and trucks. We had one truck which helped deliveries. Also we had other smaller vehicles and we managed to get some petrol for them, but we had to be very careful not to waste any.



Interviewer: The American soldiers during the war?

Mrs. Blatchford: The American soldiers, after having a night out in Newcastle, would be walking from Hunter Street to Mayfield, where a truck would be waiting to pick them up. They would be near our cake shop and would end up buying a large block of sponge, have it cut into a piece each and then go on with it in their hands and eating as they go to their pick up place.

On Sundays our shops had to close at 11a.m. Soldiers would come in our shop and have milk shakes with treble icecream in them. They were very nice people, behaved very well. At 11a.m. they just said goodbye and went to the Sacred Heart Church. After church they were taken to homes for lunch, a trip around the beaches, of which we have approximately 8-10, or to Lake Macquarie.

Interviewer: During the war Eric and yourself decided to have a family?

Mrs. Blatchford: Early in the war Don was born - 1940. Ross - 2 years later. Bruce 2 years later. Warren, his twin brother, died five days later.

Interviewer: Did any of your children get involved in the business?

Mrs. Blatchford: Yes, both Don and Ross entered the business - Ross two years later than Don. Don was apprenticed, Ross also. Don did a crash course at East Sydney Tech. College, doing 4 days a week for 4 weeks. Eric taught Ross himself. Each are terrific pastrycooks.

Bruce entered in the business later. He had a job in a factory but really only wanted to do office work. Bruce had a heart problem, went into a Sydney hospital and had an operation on a valve of the heart.

Interviewer: You catered for many organizations?

Mrs. Blatchford: My husband was already catering privately ( weddings, birthdays, private affairs, supplying wedding cakes, birthday cakes, Masonic Lodge special cakes, Belmont Yacht Club in its early stages).

Eric was a member of the day club and Lodge Stonehaven, Hamilton. The day club was specifically for those who could not get to the night meetings regularly - like police, tramway and business people.

Beginning there, Eric moved on to Newcastle Greyhound Racing at Beaumont Park, horse racing at Newcastle Jockey Club, R.S.L. clubs, particularly Hamilton, of which he was patron. Supplying pies and sausage rolls to Leagues Clubs and any sporting venue that asked, also wool stores. At one time I catered for a special lunch at the Jockey Club when the then Governor ~~and~~ Sir Laurence Street ~~were~~ <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ the guests.

Also, Eric decided to open another shop called "Variety". On the day of the opening the shop was crowded outside and in. I would say everybody there knew him personally. An automatic donut machine ordered from America was a very popular sight.

Interviewer: It was around this time Eric passed away?

Mrs. Blatchford: After Eric died I inherited the business, also 145 Beaumont Street. After six months I had our accountants change the business<sup>to</sup>a company, "Blatchfords Pty. Ltd." Myself - A class shares, my sons - B class shares.

The will was made before Don, Ross and Bruce were born. That is the reason they were not in the will, which is why I decided on a company.

Interviewer: Subsequently the business was taken over by them?

Mrs. Blatchford: You see, I did not want the business for myself. Don and Ross managed the bakehouse, Bruce the office. Myself, I found a spot where I could do things that I liked to do and knew I could do well. I had no wish to stay in an office.

Interviewer: How is the business faring to-day?

Mrs. Blatchford: After some problems and lots of work (a new accountant has helped the business) it is progressing very well.

Interviewer: The future of Blatchfords Pty. Ltd.?

Mrs. Blatchford: The future of Blatchfords Pty. Ltd. will always include pies, sausage rolls.

Ross and Bruce are very pleased. Bruce's son, Chris has joined the firm and is serving his apprenticeship in Newcastle. He is 17 years old and wants to be the best pastrycook in Newcastle and own his own shop (not wholesale).

Ross and Bruce own the building which is called "Cherrys Terrace", built in 1877.

The business is wholly wholesale except for a small shop area in the packing department. The customers are regular and know our people - Diane - (Aaron dec.), Ross's wife and mother of Drew and Troy; Belle - my niece who has worked there since she was 14 years old, mother of Brett and grandmother of Erin, Kate and Elle.

## HISTORY OF E.H. BLATCHFORD IN NEWCASTLE

The history of E.H. Blatchford, Wholesale Pastrycook and Caterer originated in 1931. Eric Blatchford had an ambition early in his apprenticeship to start his own business. His future wife, Doris, whom he met towards the end of his apprenticeship, played a vital role in the establishment of their business.

The business was formed at the beginning of the Depression. The Depression caused a long period of unemployment, poverty and despair. The first indications of a world-wide economic downturn struck the Newcastle region earlier than other areas. Jack Lang, Premier of New South Wales wrote:

One of the fallacies about the Depression is the widely held view that it started with a fall in wool and wheat prices. That is not so .... The first impact occurred in the coal industry .... I registered the first mass misery and suffering seen in this country for a third of a century.<sup>1</sup>

The Depression did not greatly affect the growth of E.H. Blatchford in the Newcastle area.

The original shop at 145 Beaumont Street, Hamilton came complete with a bakehouse. An additional shop was opened at 105 Maitland Road, Islington. Both Eric and Doris worked long hours, sometimes up to 15 hours a day. The only time they had off was at night and on Sunday mornings, when the day was taken up enjoying the surf.

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1. W. Parkes, J. Comerford, M. Lake. Mines, Wines and People. Newcastle. 1979, p.197.

Then it was a rush back to the bakery to make sponges and hot scones, and to open the shop. These were the big sellers on Sundays. People strolling by would often drop in and buy sponges and scones for the Sunday picnic or afternoon tea. A further premise was opened at 815 Hunter Street, Newcastle.

The Second World War began in 1939. Business boomed for the Blatchfords. They were the single suppliers of food products to the major factories such as B.H.P., Goninans and Lysaghts.

During the war petrol became unavailable and the cars were fitted out with natural gas. Eric Blatchford converted his utility in this manner, and this allowed him to continue delivering food products to his customers. At this time Doris Blatchford had their first son, Don, in 1940.

The American soldiers were stationed in Newcastle during the war. Mrs. Blatchford had many fond memories of the soldiers. After having a night out in Newcastle they would be walking from Hunter Street to Mayfield where a truck would be waiting to pick them up. Doris said:

They would be near our cake shop, come in and buy a large block of sponge, have it cut up into pieces of equal size, and eat it as they walked towards their destination point.

During the war many soldiers came into the shop on their way to the Sacred Heart Church at Hamilton on Sundays.



They would buy milkshakes and cakes after church. The business profits were high during the war years.

Throughout the war electricity strikes were common. The Blatchfords overcame this by using an old van which was labelled the "Cream Puff". It was placed on blocks and was used to keep the mixing machines operating, and therefore the production of pies, sausage rolls, buns and rock cakes was made possible.

One of Eric Blatchford's specialities was cake decorating. Eric received many orders for wedding and birthday cakes and also catered for the Masonic Lodge, of which he was a member. At the same time Eric managed to cater for weddings, greyhound and horseracing, and the Newcastle trots. Catering was requested from many spheres, such as the Wool Stores and the Newcastle Showground. Pies were also supplied to many local sporting events.

The following is a list of shops which were commenced by Eric and Doris Blatchford:

New Lambton - Mrs. Silva's shop.

Cardiff - Iris Boog walked Cardiff for orders.

145 Beaumont Street, Hamilton - shop and residence.

105 Maitland Road, Islington - shop and residence.

815 Hunter Street, Newcastle West - shop and residence.

Blue Room Coffee Shop, Wolfe Street, Newcastle.

The "Variety Shop", the last shop Eric opened.

The family had three additional members. Ross was born two years after Don in 1942, and twins Bruce and Warren were born in 1944. Warren died five days after he was born.

In 1968 Eric died at the age of 57 years. Doris quoted, "He died as he lived, everyone's friend." Throughout his life Eric Blatchford proved prosperous as a pastrycook. Some of the more prominent skills he had were as a decorator of cakes and the making of the great "Australian Pie", for which he is renowned to-day. As a diversion from his business Eric studied Art, and was an oil painter. Eric also had a great affection for music. He was a capable banjo and clarinet player, and also taught himself the piano.

After Eric died the business was left to Doris, who then transformed it into a company, which it is to-day, "Blatchfords Pty. Ltd.", and Don, the eldest son, proceeded to manage the business with his two brothers, Bruce and Ross, working as pastrycooks. The business has since changed management, and Bruce and Ross are the owners. Don has withdrawn from the business and is presently working as a baker at Tip-Top. Doris also resigned around this period but maintained her contact by helping periodically in the bakehouse.

During this time the shop was supplying their products to a variety of shops in Hunter Street and Mayfield

regions. Power stations, mines, service stations and clubs were all part of their clientele. They also supplied a 24 hour staff to Buttercup Bakeries, which ceased functioning due to overcommitment. Doris retired in 1989, leaving the business affairs to her sons, Bruce and Ross.

Several shops have since been sold and the business is now concentrating on the supply of pies, donuts, pastries and sausage rolls to various shops throughout Newcastle. The bakehouse has undergone recent renovations and an automatic pie and sausage roll machine has been installed. The ovens remain to function on natural gas.

The only business still in operation is located at 102 Cnr. Crompton and Denison Streets, Hamilton. The premises is now one of the oldest in the area. The building was erected in 1877 and is titled "Cherry's Terrace".

Ross and Bruce Blatchford are the present owners of the business, with grandson Chris currently undertaking an apprenticeship as a pastrycook. Chris's goals are to be the best pastrycook in Newcastle and to uphold the "Blatchford" name.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

COMERFORD, J.; LAKE, M.; PARKES, W. (1979) Mines, Wines and People.

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1989

I, Doris Blatchford ..... give my  
permission to Mladen Lazic .....

to use this interview, or part of this interview, for  
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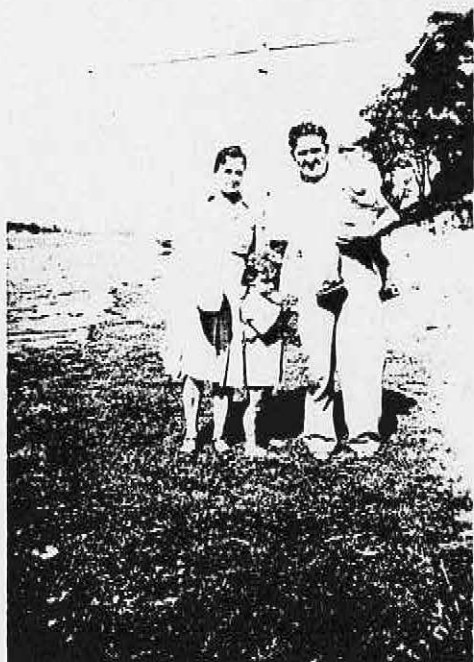
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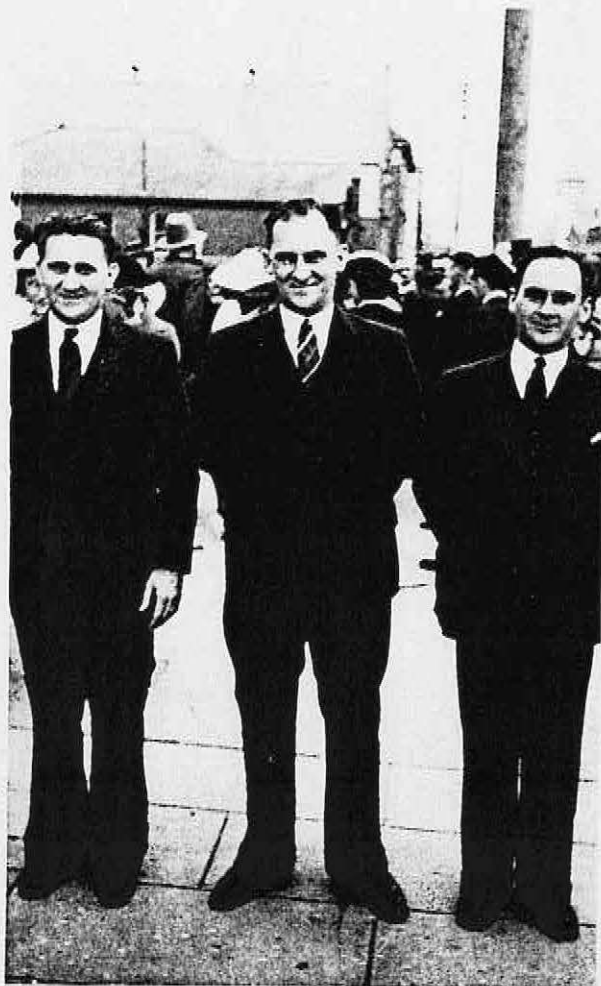
Signed Doris Blatchford .....

Date 10 / 9 / 89 .....

Interviewer Mladen Lazic .....



The Blatchford Family  
DORIS, ERIC, BRUCE, ROSS  
+ DON.



ERIC and friends.

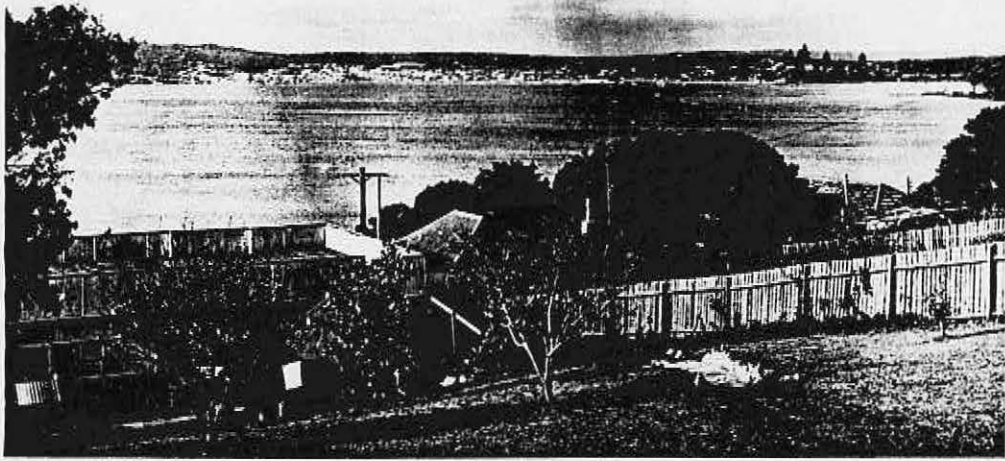


ERIC playing his  
Clarinet.



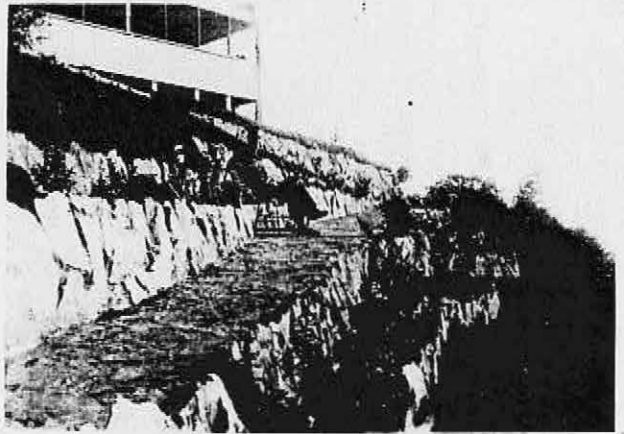
Doris ERIC + friend  
socialising.





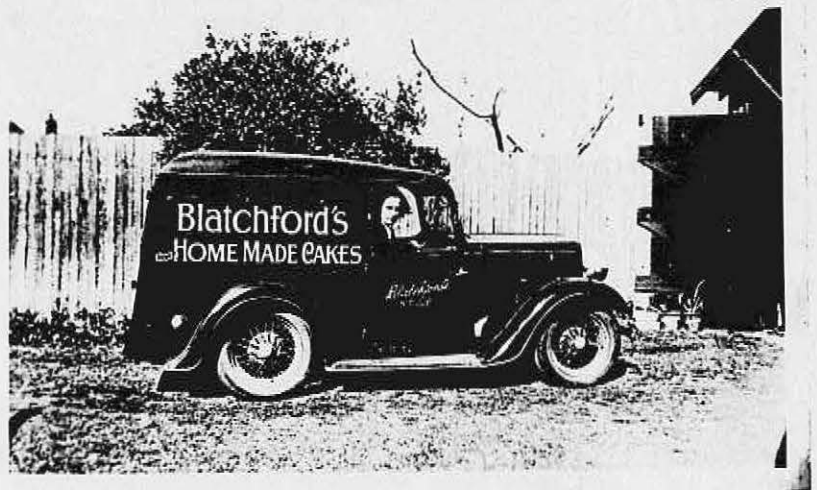
VIEW FROM MARK'S POINT

The Blatchford's Home <



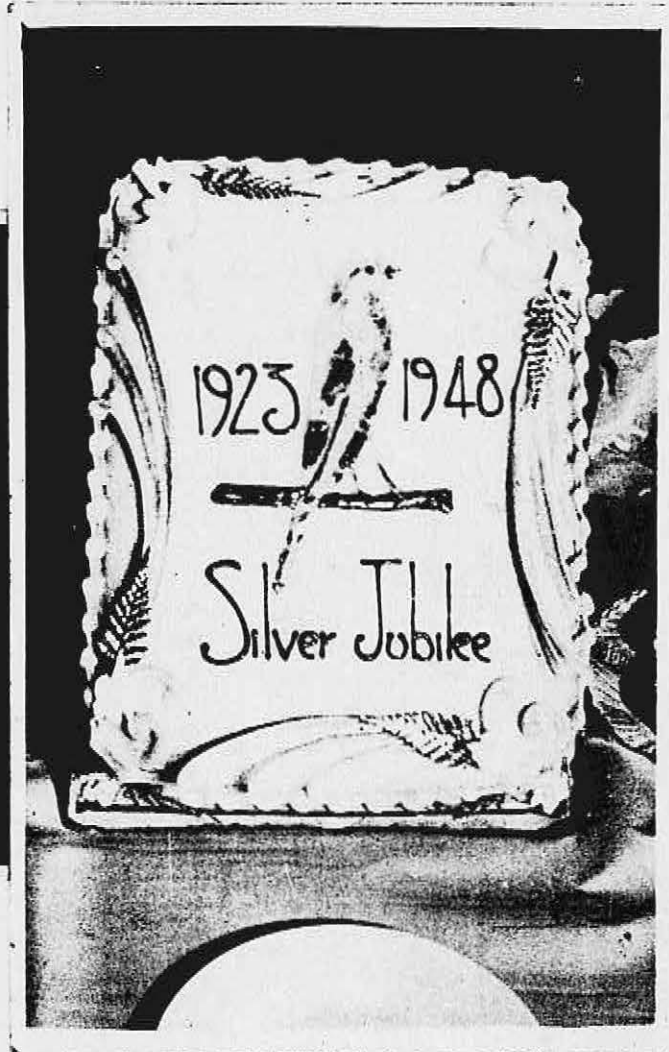
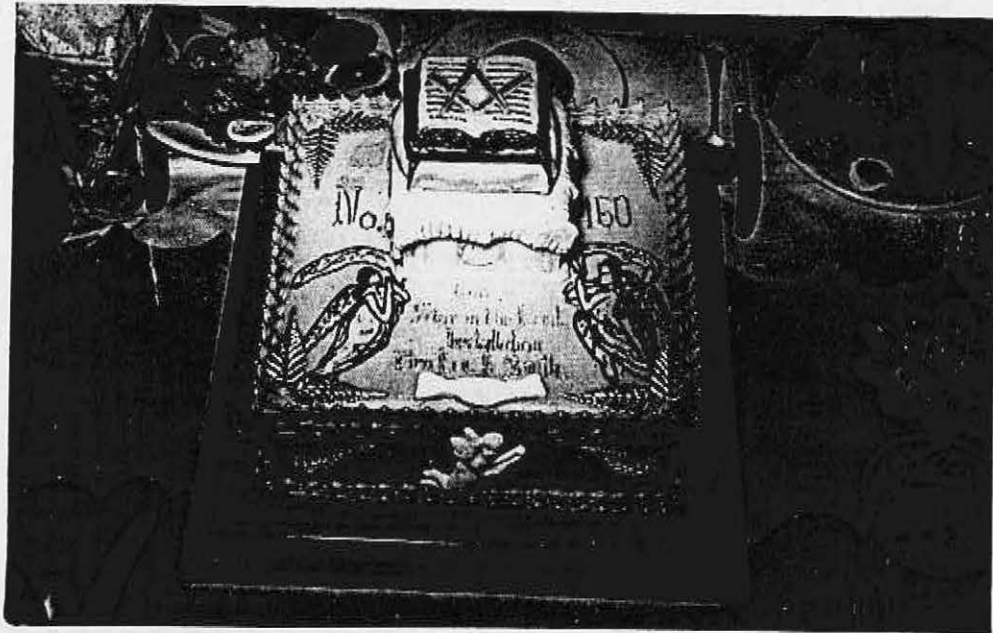
~~X~~ ↑ ERIC Blatchford

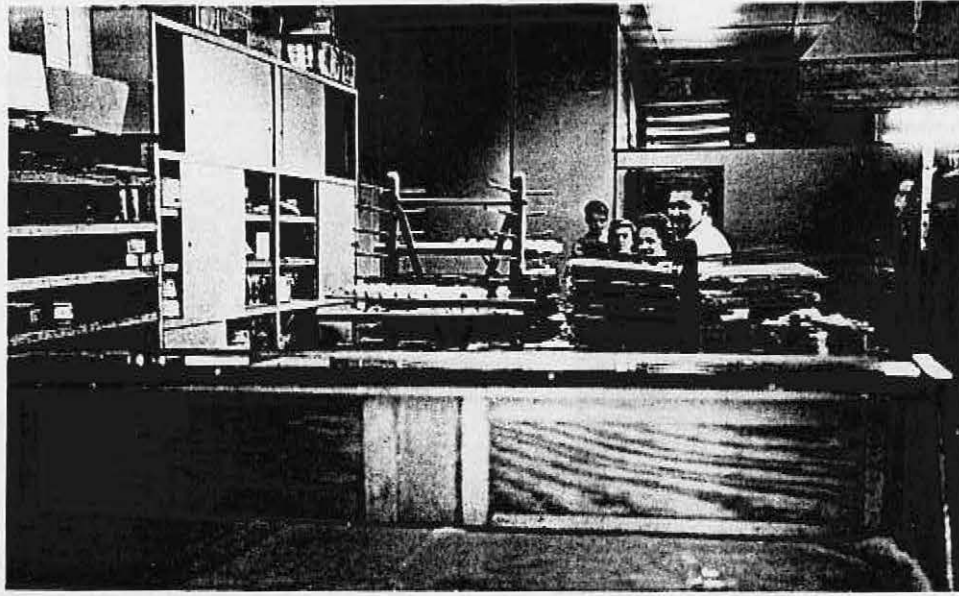
DORIS Blatchford





The many cakes decorated by ERIC.





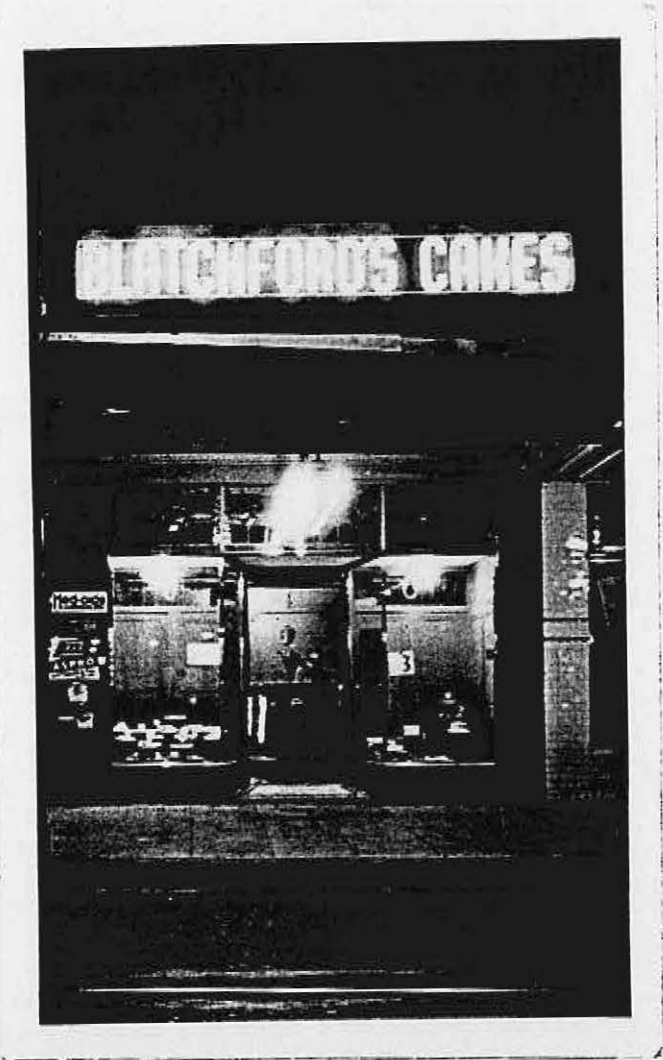
The Blatchford's First Bakehouse at  
Hamilton.



"Cherry Terrace" Shop at  
Denison St, Hamilton.

ERIC Blatchford.  
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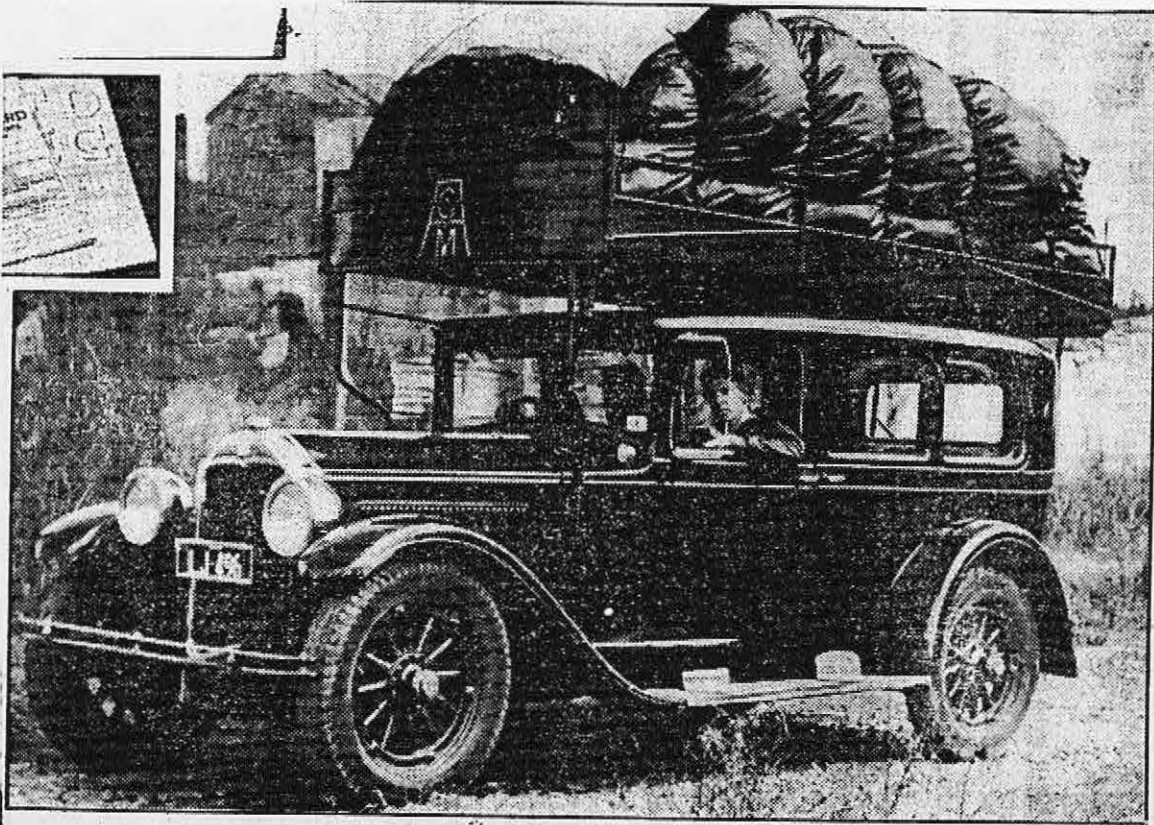


ONE of the Stores.



Staff at Blatchford's  
Doris + Eric Blatchford.





A car in 1940 fitted out to hold 300 cubic feet of natural gas on roof racks for propulsion

Eric Blatchford.



Eric + Doris catering for a wedding.

