

THE DEMISE OF BRODIE'S GARAGE 1927-2009

My father, Leonard Austin (1896-1976) at the time of my birth in 1937 managed a small garage in Collierenabri NSW. In 1941 during an Easter holiday visit to my grandparents in Dunedoo he received a letter from the owner of the garage who stated that he could no longer afford to pay a manager. However, this news was tempered by his search for positions in other towns for Dad. One, was at Brodie's Garage in Wentworth Avenue in Canberra – and that is why we came here.

The garage was built in 1927 for Mr Brodie of Bredbo who determined to buy the site. The upset value was 1,500 pounds. Brodie paid 11,400. The garage, which was finished in white stucco was designed by architects Messrs Rudd and Limburg and was built by McCauley.

The garage that in addition to having the usual repair section, had eight bowsers undercover and a car sales room. May 1927 issue of *The Canberra Times* added to the description - *a distinguished feature of the edifice will be a small surmounting lantern tower which will serve as a road lighthouse to incoming motorists*. This lantern was intended to light the way to Canberra.

When first built contemporary aerial photographs show the garage to be like an island in a sea of paddocks. In the 1920s, 30s and 40s Brodie's was still a major landmark. During the 1920s and 1930s It was known as the six mile and was the turning point for many of the cycle races that usually commenced at the Queanbeyan PO. Molonglo (Fyshwick) was known as the 4 mile and Riverbourne Settlement (opposite Harman) as the three mile.

Nobby (Norman) Robertson of Oaks Estate was one of the cyclists that I interviewed. He lived at Oaks Estate and mentioned that the prize winnings made the difference to the finances in the years of the Depression. The bikes that the contestants rode were not the stream lined bikes used today. They were the same bikes ridden daily to work.

There are many reports of these races in *The Canberra Time*. One example in the issue dated 2 September 1939 states: *Races set down for decision by the Queanbeyan Cycling Club to-morrow are a 32 mile senior handicap is to be ridden over the Jerrabomberra Avenue and Brodie's Garage courses, and 10 mile junior handicap. Both events will start and finish in Crawford Street, the first being timed to start at 10.30am...*

A story told to me - During the war, Brodie's was the scene of the discovery of a German spy. The girlfriend of a Dutch officer, who turned out to be German, without his permission, decided to have his car serviced. Unfortunately for him the plans of Harman and a machine gun, stored in the car, were found with the result that he disappeared.

My father finished work at Brodies in 1943 or 44 when he moved to Darwin with the Civil Construction Corp. After his return he did not return to Brodies but took up a position in the Fitters & Turners Shop next to the Power House where he remained until his retirement.

Sometime in the 1950s or later Brodie's lost its name. It became the Mobil Garage in Wentworth Avenue. The lantern and old entrance went and the old building was obscured by new workshops and office. The last traces of the garages went with the demolition of the structures in October/November 2009.

The demise of Brodie's has not been marked by any ceremony or mention in a paper. This building, like the old Capitol and Civic Theatres has gone and another link with the beginnings of the city has been removed and forgotten.

Ann Gugler 10 November 2009

