"A STORY OF CROOKED CORNER"

The bend in the road opposite the school chapel once bore the name of Crooked Corner and was the scene of much activity in the early life of the district, the surrounding area was known as Esrom.

Since Australia was first settled, transportation has been one of the greatest factors influencing the development of the country and in setting the pattern of our Australian way of life. The difficulties and inadequacy of transport created many situations and conditions which still have their effect on us today.

Bathurst has many villages and communities close by -- for instance -- Kelso, Raglan, O'Connell, Perthville, The Bald Hills (now Mt. Panorama), Evans Plains, Eglinton, Esrom, Rosehill, Dunkeld, Duramana, Mt. Rankin, Fremantle, and so on. The list could be extended to include many more considered to be within the District and the Bathurst sphere of influence. Transport limitations were originally responsible for these communities being established; people could not readily move about and the only means of making a journey was by horse-drawn vehicle or on foot until the advent of the motor car in the 1920's.

These outposts of the city were connected by wide roads, very suitable for present day methods of transportation. This came about not by forward planning for motor vehicles, but because of a transportation problem. Bullock teams and horse waggons were clumsy and the need to provide roads wide enough to turn around arose from the beginning. Governor Macquarie gave orders to the first surveyors to make the roads and streets wide enough to turn the teams around anywhere. The famous wide streets of Bathurst, and later of Melbourne, were a direct result of an early transport need and Governor Macquarie's orders.

In the period 1830 and during the gold rush days at Ophir, Hill End, Sofala, and Tambaroora, the "Crooked Corner" (in the village of Esrom) came into prominence. A Post Office was established, also a pub, "The Travellers Rest", which usually follows where business and trading is conducted.

In those early days a centre such as Esrom was known as a trading post where goods were brought to the centre for both bartering and other less respectable media of trade. The teams bringing the gold into Bathurst had inadequate facilities in the town to unhook, feed and spell the bullocks and horses. This required quite some space, so the practice of moving out to Esrom after unloading was established. This meant that the food for the gold fields and provisions for the miners and fossickers had to be brought out to the waggons to load for the return journey -- thus, Crooked Corner at Esrom became a trading post.

A number of houses was built in proximity to Esrom and prominent among these were Esrom House, built by Mr. Alexander Watt in 1833-34, later sold to Mr. R.D. Barton and enlarged by him, and is now All Saints' College main building; Excelsior House, adjoining the College was built by Thomas Jarman Hawkins, and is now known as Errington Park. Both of these buildings are standing today and both in excellent condition, practically all the other residences which served to house
families who worked at the trading post and on the adjacent farms have long since disappeared.

Where the Headmaster's residence now stands was the site of the old hotel "The Travellers Rest", where many a doubtful grog was dispensed. A favourite trick to make profit was to nail plugs of tobacco to the bottom of empty rum casks and half fill them with water, this became the "one for the road". The timber in the old rum casks would become saturated with rum, with the addition of water the rum would leave the cask timber and mix with the water. However, the potion was a bit negative, but the plugs of tobacco soon livened it up considerably after standing for a while, and the result had a most devastating effect on the departing travellers. It either sobered them up, or "knocked them rotten". Both results were useful, for those who became sober could continue on their way without trouble and those who were affected the other way just slept it off before travelling on.

Another outstanding practice worthy of note originated at the old trading post -- that of "gold combing", and the yield from this provided the waggoners and teamsters with a bonus for their hard work. The gold was usually packaged in green hide plaited gunny sacks for transportation to the banks, and during the long journey over the rough and practically unformed road the gold would get such a shaking up that fine particles would sift through the plaited bags onto the waggon trays, then work down between the gaps in the waggon bottoms and would be lost in the dust along the way. The teamsters soon noticed this and lined the bottoms of the wagons with bullock hides with the fur up. The fine gold would lodge in this fur during the trip and remain there until combed out by the teamsters after returning to the Crooked Corner in Bathurst.

The practice was no secret and was considered to be a hazard of the operation by the owners, and at one time the teamsters refused to cart the gold unless it was in plaited gunny sacks.

At this stage of the story it may be considered by many that these events of somewhat doubtful character and many others which originated at Esrom were the reasons why this part of the Ophir Road was named "Crooked Corner" -- well this was not so.

In the original survey the section of the Ophir Road from East Bathurst to Mt. Pleasant was straight following almost parallel with the Macquarie River before it turned away towards Rock Forest, Fremantle and Ophir at the junction where the Evans Creek entered the river. The Ophir Road crossed a little sandy creek at Esrom which carried a small flow of water most of the time, probably spring fed in dry times. The sandy land on each side of this little stream was usually well saturated and presented a substantial pull for the laden teams both ways, as a consequence the teams had to have a "straight go" to cross. The sandy creek crossed the road at an angle which made it necessary for the teams to pull over the creek at right angles to it, this brought about a bend in the road, and so the spot became known as "Crooked Corner". Many of the practices which took place there no doubt gave it a name to live up to.

Although land surveys were completed, fences were non-existent, and the bullock teams tracked across T.J. Hawkins property, Walmer, to a ford in the Macquarie River and this deviation from the surveyed road was known as "Masons Lane".
John Mason had a blacksmith's shop near the river at the ford before Rankin's Bridge was erected. When Walmer was fenced, John Mason brought a small area from T.J. Hawkins on the main road to set up the blacksmith shop in 1856-57 (the present one is the third Rankin's Bridge over the river, the other two were swept away by big floods). Mason's Lane was one of two access roads to Duramana, Turon and the gold-fields in the early days, and it passed through the privately owned property of Walmer.

In 1903, road traffic ceased to use Mason's Lane to Rankin's Bridge and a junction to the main road was established and surveyed.

It is interesting to note that there was a continuation of Mason's Lane where it crossed the Ophir Road, known as Avenue Drive, through Hawkins Park past the cemetery to the Orange Road. This access road is not the stock route.

The settlement pattern in the early days around the Crooked Corner took the form of people living well apart from each other. This form of settlement was necessary as each family had to have enough land for sustenance with cows, poultry, horses, sheep and vegetable growing -- under these circumstances the area was considered to be fully occupied.

It is not intended that a complete record of early land grants in the area known as Esrom should be recorded here, but it is interesting to list the names of many people who resided in the area from its beginning in 1830 up to the First World War.

James Robinson (and family) early explorer, whose land grant fronted onto the Bathurst side of Esrom Street.

James Walker did not occupy his land grant, it was purchased and developed by Francis Bathurst Suttor, later Sir Francis Suttor and named "Bradwardine".

Esrom House stands upon the original land grant of 320 acres, to James Blacket by Governor Darling in 1834. Mr. Blacket named the grant "Longlea", built the first house on the area, a pise house of English architectural design with a shingle roof, gablea, bay windows with sliding panels fitted with diamond style glass known as lead lights, and all cedar fittings.

In 1834 the option on the grant promise was taken over by Alexander Watt from Thomas Blacket, he re-named it "Esrom" reputedly after the last land sighted by him after leaving Denmark when he migrated to Australia. The grant transfer was confirmed by Governor Bourke to Alexander Watt in 1834, and he built "Esrom House", a one storey building with an open courtyard.

In 1874 Alexander Watt sold the property to a Bathurst solicitor Mr. Fletcher, who carried out several alterations to Esrom House. In 1885 it was purchased by Mr. R.D. Barton, who made substantial additions and alterations.

During this period, the Crooked Corner became only a ghost name from the past.
In 1870 Esrom House was leased by James de Beauzeville, whose son, James P. de Beauzeville married Hanna Anne Watt in 1877. During this period educational classes for boys were conducted at Esrom House.

Esrom House remained in the possession of the Watt family until 1923, when All Saints' College was re-opened by The Reverend L.G.H. and Mrs. Watson and Mr. C.C.F. McLeod. Great credit is due to the pioneering spirit of the Reverend and Mrs. Watson and Mr. McLeod when they purchase Esrom House, the adjoining land, "The Travellers' Rest" Hotel, and the old Post Office and set up the necessary facilities to start the college going again, after a close-down period between 1919 and 1923.

Adjoining Esrom was the land grant "Walmer" to Thomas Jarman Hawkins. The name "Walmer" originated from Walmer Castle in Deal, England, one of the fortresses against invasion on the North Sea shores of England and headquarters of the Warden of the Cinque Ports of England. Sir Winston Churchill, the great British statesman and wartime leader, was a Warden, followed by Sir Robert Menzies, who holds the title at the present time. Mr. Thomas Jarman Hawkins' mother, Elizabeth Hawkins of Blackdown, lived in Deal, England, which was a beautiful place, and no doubt influenced her sons in naming the property Walmer.

The first inland vineyards for commercial wine-making were established on Walmer and the original storage cellars still exist under Walmer House. Thomas Hawkins imported the first inland vigneron from Germany and Scotland, Mr. Voigt and Mr. Dinger, who established vineyards, digging the land by hand.

Names of people residing in the area would be difficult to trace and complete, but among them: Bassettes; De Beauzeville, French settlers; Stanes, who built the Travellers' Rest Hotel; Jardines, the Post Office family; Fitzpatrick, built Avoca House; John Neuland, gas worker pioneer; Hastings, farmer; Kilkos, builder; Atkin, who built Llanarth House, 1859; Smiths, Llanarth; Masons, blacksmith; Cavens, farmer; Harradins, farmer; Caples, farmers; Cubia, farmer; Fitzgerald, Travellers' Rest Hotel; Catley, drover; Burkes, asparagus cutters; Larry O'Shea, farmer; Bloodsworth, farmer; Sullivan, farmer; Godfrey, teamster; Charlie Prior, mailman; Harry Prior, Will Race constructor; J. Cox, farmer; Geo. Taylor, chaff cutting contractor; Warks, farmers; Tarry Hop-Sing, Jar Dong, Walter Hing, Cranky Ching, Charlie Lew Nic, Weh Moon, all Chinese market gardeners.

Both names, Esrom and Crooked Corner, have almost disappeared as the march of time, progress in general and in our educational facilities, so well illustrated by All Saints' College has overshadowed the past and the area has taken on the name of the College. It is the fourth location of the College and on present indications could be the last for at least the next 100 years.

The original land survey at Esrom took in Bredwardine (James Walker), Esrom (Alexander Watt), Walmer (Thomas Hawkins) bounded by Esrom Street, Suttor Street, Carrs Road and fronted to the Macquarie River. Those properties have always been highly productive and at the present time would earn more dollars per acre and provide stable employment for more people than any other similar rural area in Australia, and are rapidly expanding in growth and productivity.
Edgell's huge food producing centre, on "Bradwardine" property will become the biggest canning and freezing plant for straight and complete food packs in Australia in the next few years, and prominent among these products will be canned asparagus. The wide range of raw materials will be road and rail freighted to the processing plant from areas spread over 200 miles -- Mudgee to Dubbo.

The last full-blooded aboriginal corroboree in the Bathurst District took place on Walmer property in 1912. The police came to disperse the aboriginals, about 100, but Fitzherbert Hawkins restrained them from taking direct action. After 24 hours everyone "cooled off" including the fires and all dispersed quietly.

Many firsts for both the Bathurst District and for Australia occurred at Esrom, where the Crooked Corner is. These include the establishment of the first Edgell Asparagus plantation, with a growth pattern that is continuous, at Bradwardine. At the time, the Asparagus was called "Edgell's curse". This was later followed by the first processing of Edgell canned asparagus, also at Bradwardine.

Gordon Edgell Pty. Ltd. was awarded first prize for apples exported to London, U.K., which were grown on the Bradwardine orchard. Moreover the original Edgell apple orchard was the first laid out with theodolites by A.W. Taylor and his son, Herbert Bendall Taylor.

The first Illawarra Shorthorn Cattle were bred at Bradwardine by Sir Francis Suttor, while the first inland vinyards were established at Walmer. Wine making and beer brewing were big business in Bathurst in the mid 19th century. During the gold-rush period there were over 100 hotels in the town. Tobacco was first planted on the Macquarie River at Walmer, Bradwardine, and Alloway Bank.

The hill formation and soil components suggest that a river ran through Crooked Corner millions of years ago. Evidence of river worn gravel can be seen throughout the area from the Macquarie River to the Great Western Highway. In more recent times the first land plane-line to check banking canal irrigation methods was established at Bradwardine. Bathurst Burrs were first discovered at Crooked Corner.

The first Chinese Masonic Society was formed at Esrom, but later moved into Bathurst. There were twenty Chinese market gardeners on each side of the Macquarie River, who would bring their produce across the river at Walmer Ford, and then to Bathurst via Esrom. Chinese New Year celebrations often "lit up the village".

The Junior Farmer movement was cradled at Esrom by Mrs. T.J. Hawkins, who gave the first awards and encouragement to the movement. A medal was struck by the government to mark the occasion.

On a different note, the first live pigeon shooting contest in the Bathurst District was conducted at the rear of the Travellers' Rest Hotel. The first and probably the only duel with pistols in the district also occurred in the vicinity of Crooked Corner. It is understood that the pistols and inscribed case noting the event are still in existence.

- Lionel Hawkins
Travellers Rest known as Fitzgerald's Pub - Licensee and wife standing on verandah. Stool on the verandah was where fish caught in the Macquarie River were officially measured.

Errom Cottage built by James Blacket.
Aerial view of All Saints' College. Bottom left hand corner shows where the Sandy Creek crossed the road. Excelsior House, bottom right hand corner.

Crooked Corner, 1923.
Travellers Rest Hotel, right hand side.

Crooked Corner, 1971.
Esrom House, early 20th Century.

Esrom House, approaching from Eglinton, close to where the Sandy Creek crossed the road.