Full transcript of an interview with

BARBARA COOKE

on 22 November 2006

by Catherine O’Brien

for the

CAMPBELLTOWN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Recording available on CD

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My name is Barbara Jean Cooke and I was born at the Gumeracha Soldiers’ Memorial Hospital on the ninth of the ninth, 1936, to parents William Cooke, Eileen May Cooke née Pritchard, and I lived at Cudlee Creek on Fox Creek Road until I was three. My father worked for his father-in-law in an apple orchard. Grandfather Pritchard owned a good part of the Cudlee Creek area. The house he lived in will be a hundred years old in 2007.

There were ten children in the family. The boys in the family worked and lived on the property. The land has now been sold off, part of it to the Cudlee Creek Golf Club. There is not an apple tree left.

My father came from Tea Tree Gully. His father was the first Town Clerk of Tea Tree Gully. Grandfather – now I’ve made a mistake; what do I do?

That’s okay, just keep talking. It doesn’t matter.

Okay. My father’s father was the first Town Clerk of Tea Gully. Grandfather’s first home was at Houghton. I belong to the Tea Tree Gully Early Settlers Club.

In 1939 we moved to Paradise. My dad had all sorts of jobs: market gardens, and he market-gardened everywhere, small pieces of land around Paradise – even grew peas in a piece of land under Kangaroo Creek Dam; grew gladis [gladioli] where Resthaven now stands; owned the property on my back fence; grew vegetables where Warrina Homes now are; had five acres of land at Addison Avenue, Athelstone, where he grew stocks. Loved flowers, belonged to the Gladiolus Society. The land was eventually sold, and in them days you had to have ten acres of land to sell, so Mr Austin had five acres and my dad had five acres.

Was that the law at the time, that you had to have ten acres?
Yes. So they joined together. And it was subdivided. Shepherdson Road now runs through the land. Austin [Avenue] runs off of it and Cooke Terrace runs off the other part of it.

Finally, he grew flowers at Norton Summit and called it Rainbow Valley.

Later worked for the Council and the Athelstone School, and kept the Athelstone Cemetery clean. Both my parents are buried at Athelstone.

And we would go back to Cudlee Creek every other weekend, just in time to walk to Sunday School at the start of the Lobethal Road. Home in time for lunch. We learnt to say grace real quick because we were often called upon to do so.

My dad had a ute, all of us kids in the back of it and we’d go to Cudlee Creek (laughs) in the back of the ute. And he got a nickname, ‘Kero Cooke’. I guess he ran the ute on kero.

Leaving my grandparents’ house it was the long way home or the short way home. We’d either come down the Prairie Road or we’d come and go to the Gorge Kiosk and come that way. But if we were good, we could come the Gorge Kiosk Road so we’d get an ice cream for being good, to come the way home. That’s right.

When we arrived in Paradise, there were approximately ten houses on George Street. And on one side of George Street the houses, ten houses, on the other side was all market gardens and they ran along the river, so that’s the Torrens River on the bottom side. And Pitts owned most of the property opposite us, and they also owned the house next door to us, so I guess they’d been there for years before us. There was no sewerage in our time on George Street: Dad would have to dig a hole to bury it. I’m not sure how often, but there was six of us kids, so – – –.

**You didn’t have septic, either, then.**

No, no, no.

And we had a cow and we used to tether it along George Street and in the back paddocks. All the houses along our back fences on George Street were boxthorn hedges or black wormwood – you know, that wormwood thing? – and most people had chooks on the back fence. And Mum milked the cow and then separated the
milk, made cream and then butter. Sweets often were junket made from the warm milk straight from the cow. You know what junket is?

**No, I don’t.**

Used to milk the cow and then you would put a tablet into the warm milk and it would set, so they called it junket and that’s we ate.

**What, so it’s like a jelly thing, is it? Oh, right.**

Yeah. Probably a bit like what they call a yogurt today, I suppose, but often we had junket because that was something in them days.

And we only had a bath once a week, Saturday afternoon. And we’d go down to the river and collect the bamboos and bring them back and put them in the chip heater. And that was a way of getting sixpence for the pictures.

**So you didn’t have electricity? Did you have electricity?**

Yeah, we had electricity. You had electricity for your lighting and that, but you didn’t have – my mum never had water into the house, like she used to have a back veranda and you used to have coppers and taps and tanks and all that sort of thing in them days. But you’d have a bath at one end of the veranda and a copper – you know, to heat the water – and then what-have-you. And in the early stage we used to carry the water from the copper across to the bath, and then we had a chip heater so we’d go down the river and get the bamboos and bring it back and put it in the fire to get a bath. And we used to get sixpence if we did that, and of course that was a way of getting sixpence so we could go to the pictures. And the closest theatre was the ‘Cap’, they called it, at St Peters in them days. I think before the chip heater we’d have to light the copper and carry the water across the back veranda. I said that, yes.

There was no running water inside the house, and we used to sit on the table at night and Mum would wash your face and hands. You didn’t have a bath every – it would be terrible today, wouldn’t it?

**I know. Can’t imagine it.**

You’d never bath once a week! (turns pages) We’d have a bath once a week, that’s right. And there’d be six of us and we’d all bath in the same water. Like first in, (laughs) best dressed, I suppose, you know what I mean? Imagine it today!

5
No.

In 1942 I started school at five and a half, and all the kids in my day, they walked to school. Mum never used to take us — —. I attended Campbelltown Primary School. There was only one main room in them days and we had a few other buildings around the area and a couple of classes – like today, I suppose – five and six would be in the same, where the Companion Centre is now, that was one of the main buildings in them days. And the school now is the Marquee[?] Club. It was, I would say, about one and a half miles to school down George Street and turned left along the Lower North East Road, and then we’d go down to Ramsey Avenue, past the old post office – there used to be a post office on the corner of Ramsey Avenue and Vagnoni [Avenue] – and then the next corner was Robertson Road – that was named after the shoemaker of the time, he used to mend your shoes – and Robertson Avenue runs up next to the Paradise Hotel.

Oh, yes.

That used to be where the — —. And then we’d just come through, we’d come up Ramsey Avenue and Robertson Road and we’d walk through the paddocks up to the school, and the school was on the corner, as you know, on the corner of Gorge Road and Darley Road.

And growing up in Paradise was fun and it didn’t cost anything. There were lots of kids: six of us, three of the Farnham[?] boys, five Hockley[?] boys and a girl and a couple of Leasing[?] kids and two Lucas girls and one White and two Silkes, and we got up to all sorts. We’d cross the river in flood, nick the oranges, put them in our knickers and cross back and lose half of them on our way. (laughter) And living on the River Torrens was our playground. We would leave in the morning and Mum would say, ‘Be back before it gets dark.’ They didn’t have to worry where we were, we’d always come home. And we’d build a cubby house down the river and stay there all day, catch the fish and yabbies and cook them in the middle of the river. And we used to find a sheet of iron from somebody’s fence and the end of a crate from somebody’s market garden crate and we’d bang it all together and put the crate at one end and another piece of wood at the other end, and then we’d get up on the corner of George Street. And I suppose in them days all the tar and that couldn’t have been what it is today: it used to melt.
Yes. Probably made of a different kind of thing, I guess.

Thing, yes. So we used to bring this canoe we’d made out of a bit of iron and come up to the corner and putty it all up with the tar and then back down the river, and that would be our canoe. As I say, it didn’t cost us anything, whatever we did. And we’d be back to the river and, as I said, the canoe never cost a penny.

As we grew up, we went to Girl Guides at Payneham and the boys had Scouts at Glenmore[?] Oval, now Campbelltown Oval.

And we’d go up near the Athelstone Football Club that now is and we’d make up a parcel and we’d put it on the road and someone would stop, and as soon as they stopped we’d pull the parcel in under the bridge. Just fun that didn’t cost anything, I suppose.

And, as I said, we lived down the river. If you couldn’t swim before you were six or seven, we’d be throwing you in. The river had many pump holes to service the market gardens, and in them days I would say the river would be ten feet deep. We used to dive out of the gum trees. Now, you’re lucky if there’s a –

Any water in it, yeah.

– foot and a half of water down the back of my place now, yeah. And our favourite swimming hole was at Donaldsons’[?] and all the kids met there after school. Donaldsons had a market garden along the river, grew the best watermelons. We would cut a square in the melons, if not ripe we’d put the square back – and now the tales are coming out. (laughter)

The next property was the Lucas Brothers – Harry and Jack and Bruce. They grew onions on a property adjoining Thornton Park Reservoir. In the school holidays we would work all day at the end of an onion patch, top and tail onions for tenpence big onions and twenty cents – I’m saying ‘cents’ now – two shillings for picklers. I earned money for my first bike and it cost thirteen pounds. Another job I had was at Frewville where they dried apricots.

Teenagers in Paradise didn’t have cars. Our pushbikes were our way of transport. We’d meet at the Temperance Hotel which named in the book is called the ‘Bridge
Hotel’, but we only knew it as the ‘Temperance Hotel’, and that’s opposite the Paradise Hotel where Matt Packer[?] built a house there.

Oh, yes, I know.

Opposite the Temperance. And, as I said, it was known as the ‘Bridge Hotel’. The hotel wasn’t open but you could go behind the back door and Mrs Fox, she’d sell you sweets from there, so I gather she lived at the hotel actually, but I don’t know what [happened]. I don’t know. Not many people know it as the ‘Temperance Hotel’, but I can always remember it having ‘Temperance’ written on there. But, as I say, on the quilt we’ve done it and it’s got the ‘Bridge Hotel’.

The Bridge Hotel.

Owned by Mr Ian[?], yes.

We went to the local dances at St Martin’s Hall. St Martin’s Hall was next to the St Martin’s Church, where the cemetery is and the hall adjoined that and now has gone. I forget who’s there now.

We’d walk to Sunday School every Sunday, got good attendance. Peggy Munchenberg[?] was my first teacher – Munchenbergs had a shop at Campbelltown opposite A.J. Stock’s – do you know where A.J. Stock’s used to be?

No, I don’t.

Down where Bi-Lo is now, it used to be.

And I went on to Norwood Technical School, the closest secondary school. We rode our bikes to school – full uniforms, gloves, hats. Prefects were in our time. I only went two years and the only credit I got was Mothercraft. (laughter) And at some time Bowman Buses came our way, firstly taking people by car from Hope Valley.

And I worked at the Highbury Hotel when I was eighteen. Could not go in the hotel until I was twenty-one. In those days they had a large beer garden, would use eighteen eighteen-gallon kegs on a Saturday afternoon.

Oh, gosh.

And the closing time was six o’clock. Imagine, back in them days.
The local dances were held once a week, one week at Athelstone, one week at Hope Valley, and then we’d go up to the Gorge Kiosk. And Reggie Neill[?] from Paradise Motors, his mum and dad, they were the band. His mum used to play the pianos and Reggie’s dad used to play the drums. And square dancing came about when I was sixteen and I hit the front pages of the paper in the championships. Square dancing was held at the Palais on North Terrace then on to Centennial Hall, Wayville.

And I started work in the school holidays at age fourteen. That thirteen-pound bike came in handy. I rode it all the way into the city and worked in Twin Street, and it was a clothing company – they made suits and uniforms. And I guess National Service was compulsory in them days because we made uniforms for National Service. And I rode along with another couple of girls, the Lucas girls from up at Paradise, and they worked at T.... Aprons.

After a couple of years I moved on to Trowbridge Jewellers in Pulteney Street. In the same year I went on to the Majestic Theatre in King William Street and became the head usherette. In my time it was Bing Crosby, Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis and Grace Kelly and all of those, and it was seven-and-six to be shown to your seats in the lounge. As I worked until the theatre closed at night, I would catch the tram to Paradise. If early, five past eleven, and if we were running late we would be twenty-five to twelve. It took a half an hour to get to Paradise. The tram only came to Paradise Hotel. We’d then walk up George Street – no lights either side of the road. On the corner of Lower North East Road was a blacksmith and a garage, and later Paradise Motors, a Volkswagen dealer.

And then I married in 1957 and my boss sent me a telegram and it reads: ‘The head girl in my show must be as good a head girl in your show.’ I changed from Cooke to Mulrine[?]. When I married, I left Paradise, moved to Addison Avenue, Athelstone. My husband had a quarry truck serviced by A.J. Stock’s at Campbelltown. Worked hard, called at the local hotel each night on the way home – six o’clock closing in them times – the Old Pig and Whistle could tell some tales.

Addison Avenue only had a few houses, top of the road was the wildflower sanctuary – do you remember the wildflower sanctuary?
No.

Somewhere I read that in a book the other day, too. And I used to walk through the paddocks to the Gorge Road down to the deli. The bike had gone and I couldn’t drive. Past the bottom church, we called it, and the cemetery has been moved further up the Gorge Road. And they only took the headstones – you know that, don’t you?

**What, they left the bodies in there?**

Yes. Nobody believes me, but that’s true. And somebody did say that they rang Max Amber and he said yes, it was true.

**Actually, I had someone else enquire about that, too, and I said I wasn’t sure.**

Yes, it is true. They’ve gone up to the Pioneer Cemetery, the headstones have.

**And the bodies are still — — —.**

And the bodies are still there. And that’s why I say (laughs) it doesn’t do too good. It’s sacred land. I don’t know why they – I actually went to Athelstone Weight Watchers and a girl, her grandmother’s headstone was shifted up there and she was really cross about it, she was really upset about it, and that was how I really did know that that’s what they did. And this particular girl, she didn’t believe me, so she rang Peter Rumbelow and then she rang somebody else, and eventually went on up to Max Amber and he said yes, that was so. So I don’t think there’s even a church up at the top – there used to be a top church and a bottom church when I lived at Addison Avenue.

**I don’t think there’s a church there, no.**

No. They just call it the Pioneer Cemetery, don’t they?

**Yes.**

So just the headstones have been shifted up to the — — —. Yes, Gorge Road. And Foxfield Shopping Centre now stands on the site.

I would phone John Martin’s for a parcel to be delivered and the answer would be (turns page) ‘Where do you live?’ ‘Athelstone.’ ‘What, out there with the blacks?’ And we were only six miles from the GPO. (laughter)

I loved the area and planned to build a new house on the block next door.
And I couldn’t drive in those days. Had lessons and I used to drive down to my mum’s at Paradise in second gear and ride home in the same way. (laughs)

While living in Athelstone we had our groceries delivered. The grocer was Ramsay Brothers, and Ramsays lived – their shop was opposite the Paradise Hotel in that complex that’s still there, there’s a pizza shop there. And they used to make bread out the back. And Siddy Francis[?], he delivered, and Sid lived on the corner of Robertson Road near the Paradise Hotel there.

Biscuits came in pounds in brown paper bags and they were cheaper if you got broken biscuits. (laughs) Ramsay’s grocery shop was in the roundabout opposite the Paradise Hotel. The first buses came to Paradise, turned there and went back to the city.

And other shops I remember in the area: a Mrs Ligerwood[?], she had a sweetshop down opposite the statue there on the corner of Gorge Road. Next to that was sort of the Clark’s butchers, and Floyds had the post office and Teddy Longbottom, he lives on the corner of Downer Avenue or did, he used to have a sweetshop there and we used to call him Teddy Longbottom. We used to only go in and read his books, and we didn’t do much. And of course there was Munchenberg’s, they had – oh, I should say probably a sweets and a lolly shop and you could buy what they’d call now a weekend supermarket, I suppose, so we could buy lots of things there. And A.J. Stock’s, the garage, they were directly opposite that.

In 1960 I had three children and I lost a little boy, and he was born with a hole in the heart and he died at four months and six months later they were able to fix that, of course.

And 1961’s a year I’d sooner forget. My husband got polio when there was quite an epidemic around. He was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital and then out to Northfield, put in an iron lung and died on the 4th May 1961 at twenty-six years old. They had immunisation in the Institute up at Athelstone, but he didn’t have his injection or whatever it was. It was lucky that we had ours, because I would never see him again, he would never – you know what I mean. And he was shifted out to Northfield and he only lasted a week. It was in that very bad epidemic that they had, and he died. He’d made the hospital on Friday morning and he died the following
Thursday morning. He was in the iron lung and the doctor always said he’d never come out of it because a minute a day, how long would it take, you know, to be as active as he was? And he’s buried in the Athelstone Independent Cemetery. And tragedy struck again – well, I was in my family home, I moved back to my mum’s – and my mum, she passed away on the 16th September the same year, and the doctor was called and he lived in the house at Lyndhurst, behind the Paradise Hotel, behind Reggie Neill’s Motors there, Lyndhurst. Dr Dorsch was his name. But the call was too late, she died on the way to the hospital at forty-six years old. And of course I was pregnant again and two days after that my Trisha was born on the day my mum was buried. And they’re all buried at the Athelstone Independent Cemetery. And I moved into my house where I’m living now.

I built, the house we were going to build at Athelstone I built at Paradise. I moved into my house on the 14th November 1961 with three children. My father came to live with me and my two younger brothers, so I had a houseful. But went on. All my children attended Campbelltown Kindergarten. Their teachers was Mrs Foster. Forty years later I still have dinner every Thursday night with that very same teacher.

The winter of ’62 the river flooded up to my back fence, and as kids I can remember us kids swinging on the old swing bridge, Silkes Road, across to Reids Road. The old ford claimed many cars. Now, where are we to? (turns pages) I get a bit all mixed up here sometimes.

And the fires must have been around that year, too, 1961 or 1962 there must have been fires up at Athelstone, because I know I’d just moved down to my place and the people from Athelstone brought their drawers and their treasures and all that down to the house. And my dad went to fight the fires, but he was gone all day and nobody knew where he was.

And the house at Athelstone I sold to McIntoshes, our local favourite footballer, Gary McIntosh.

Oh, Gary McIntosh.

Yes. And his mum, she grew up with me and she lived, the Richardsons – she was a Richardson, and she lived down in between Clark the butcher and Mrs Ligerwood. If you go down the Gorge Road and you kept going across the road, you’d run into her
house. So I grew up with her, but she married McIntoshes and that was who I sold my house to was Thelma and – I forget his name. But McIntoshes always lived on Addison Avenue up in the back paddock.

And the winter of 1962, I told you about the floods, didn’t I?

Yes.

And the cost of housing in 1961, the house I live in today: the block of land in Willow Drive was six hundred and eighty-eight pounds, that’s what the block cost me. And then I had the house built for five thousand, nine hundred pounds. And that was everything: fences, drives, rainwater tanks, your laundry, your clothesline and fences and everything. It’s incredible, isn’t it?

Everything’s separate nowadays.

Separate nowadays. And my house was the first house in Willow Drive. I was block ten and now I’m number one. The true story of the cost of my house was only nine pounds. We had an insurance policy and we only made one payment, my husband – in them days you could have an insurance policy and it came off your tax, whatever you paid out with life insurance it came off your tax, and he paid one payment. One nine pounds. That was all he paid. So that was how come I got my house within the year or so, because of the payout of the insurance policy. So it was sad, but it was a saviour, too.

Yeah, lucky.

Yeah. And my children went to the Campbelltown Primary School. My eldest daughter, she was one of the first students that attended Campbelltown Tech, later Thornton High, and now it’s Charles Campbell. Paradise Primary School opened and Tania, one of my girls, was one of the first students. And there I coached netball and played in the school mums’ team. Then on to St Bernard’s after and played basketball. I worked in the school canteens and my girls belonged to the marching girls – that took up all day Saturday. And that’s faded out too now, hasn’t it?

I think they still have it down at Marian somewhere.

Oh, do they? But it was like the Campbelltown Band and all of that, it was all quite a — — —.
And it was back to work in 1968. I started at the Reservoir Hotel as the old hotel became the new. I worked there for twenty-one years. Worked with Rotary for eighteen years, serving their meal on a Monday night and I went to school with many of them. Just recently I volunteered to go back as a waitress for their birthday, now meeting at the Athelstone Football Club. One thing comes to mind: how Nick Bianco has grown. He would come into the hotel saloon bar and order nibbles for his staff, no more than eight. It’s incredible, isn’t it, how you sort of think? And I worked with Vili’s brother, Joe. He would come in there and he would sell Vili’s pies and pasties along the bar – remember Vili’s pies and pasties? His brother used to work with us, Joe.

Kangaroo Creek was being constructed and the hotel served many meals for them. Mrs H..... still owns the hotel. I catch up with her often at Country Bumpkin’s, a smocking shop. There I smock for a group called ‘We Care’, we smock dresses for the stillborn at the Women’s and Children’s Hospital.

I left the hotel as the apprentice chef opened a bakery next to Tony and Mark’s fruit and veg called Randall’s Bakery. After two years he sold and I’m still at his shop three hours a week, like the furniture, sixteen years later. (laughs)

And I make jam for that shop and I sell it for childhood cancer, and I’d say we make twenty-four dollars every week. Eventually health regulations will stop a lot of charity work. I started for the Flying Doctors until they wanted lids on their things and all the ingredients.

I have in many ways had a fortunate life. I have travelled on my own a good part of the world.

Now turned seventy, (laughs) I still care a few days a week for one of our very early settlers’ granddaughters, aged ninety-three. Sir Sidney Kidman grew up in Maryvale Road, his father owned fifty acres. He left Athelstone at the age of sixteen, went on to make his fortune. I belong to a club called The Athelstonians, and we took a bus from his home on Maryvale Road and followed in his footsteps to Kapunda. The granddaughter lives in Dulwich House, Dulwich. And the large dining room’s got a photo of Sidney and his wife, Isabella.

So that’s my – – –.
Thank you very much. You never remarried after your husband – – –?

Yes, I did, yes, but it’s not – – –.

No. I just wondered.

Yes. (laughs) That’s a closed book. No. Very hard for anybody today to – you know, you look and you see children and families break up and somebody has to be very good to take on somebody else’s children.

Children, yes.

We sort of never parted – he just said one day, ‘You think I’d better go?’ And I said, ‘I think that’s a good idea.’ So that’s what happened, yes. So when I sort of write it down, you know what I mean? But yes, so Paradise has grown and it’s seen lots of changes.

And you’d never move out of the area?

No, I don’t think so. No, I’ve got my block of land at Athelstone there at the Independent Cemetery, so I gather I’ll – yes, I will end up up there.

Well, thank you very much for your time –

That’s okay.

– and I’m closing the interview at twenty-five past one.

Okay.

Okay, thank you.

Thank you very much. So I suppose – everybody always says to me, ‘You should write it down’, and I suppose it’s true.

END OF RECORDING.