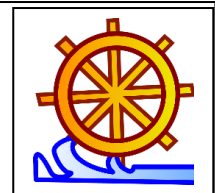


# HELM



## Heritage of East Lake Macquarie

August 2018

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### BAKING AN AUSSIE ICON

Up there with our other national foods like the Anzac biscuits, lamingtons, dampers and pavs, is the versatile Aussie food icon – **THE PIE**. We eat these baked pastries for snacks, breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hot or cold sweet pies with delicious fruit and sweet fillings. The aroma of hot savoury pies filled with beef, chicken, veg, seafood, egg and bacon or countless other varieties and combinations leave you craving for one, especially on cold wintery days. They come in many shapes and sizes – family, individual, party pies. Eat them at the football, bakeries, eateries, school, home; on their own or with veg on the side. Then there are the more up-market ones like pot pies available at clubs, pubs and restaurants; not to mention their cousins: pasties, quiches, tarts, flans.



The very earliest pies can be traced back to the Ancient Egyptians, who made a sweet pie with a rye, wheat and barley crust, filled with honey. The pies we savour today were introduced to the new colony of Australia by the British and Irish. This tradition had evolved in medieval times. The word “pye” first surfaced in the 14<sup>th</sup> century; derived from “magpie”. The fillings, like the birds’ nests being made up from odds and ends. The early English pies, like the Greek and Roman ones before them, used the pastry not as a tasty, flaky crust to be enjoyed; but as a type of casserole dish to cook and preserve meat in very hard rye flour up to 7 inches thick. The rock hard pastry which resembled a coffin, was either given to the poor, crumbled up to thicken soups or thrown away. Pies varied according to the different groups of settlers, ranging from steak and kidney, and guinness pies to cornish pasties. The most common ingredients were mutton and gravy, as they were cheaper at the time than vegetables. They became available in Sydney in the mid 1800s as a counter lunch in hotels. Soon their distribution extended to pie carts at places of entertainment, holiday destinations and sporting events. They were kept in tin boxes and kept warm by a charcoal stove. Sellers sometimes pierced the top with their thumb

to top up the contents with more gravy. Later they were delivered locally by horse-drawn carts and then vans; until mass produced pie companies emerged, supplying nationally and overseas -such as Sargents, Four’n twenty, Mrs Macs, Vilis, and Harry’s Café de Wheels. Then there are our own locally grown favourites – Thompsons, McEwans, Darbys and Barrys; and many local suburban bakeries.



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Kindly supporting the community – including Caves Beach Surf Life Saving Club; this edition of HELM newsletter.

**4972 1066 - NOW AT SWANSEA!**  
**SWANSEA PLAZA ARCADE**  
**NEAR COLES, DARBY’S AND BLONDIES**

## NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PIE PRODUCERS.

In the early **1890s**, **SARGENTS** pies were produced by George and Charlotte Sargent at their shop in Paddington; with small pies selling for a penny. They expanded by opening another two bakeries and refreshment rooms. In 1912 they moved further afield into the Melbourne market; and then supplying state and federal parliaments. (Federal Parliament met in Melbourne until 1927, before moving to Canberra.) Rapid expansion saw 36 refreshment rooms and shops, a manufacturing depot, a catering section and ballroom. In the 1960s, the refreshment rooms began to close; they stopped selling at the Royal Sydney Easter Show. Despite the company being sold, fresh pies were still distributed daily to small shops and canteens until 1981, when their pies became available only as a frozen commodity.

[Source: *Australian food timeline*]

**1947** saw the emergence of **FOUR'N TWENTY** in Bendigo being baked by Leslie McClure; at first called the Dad and Dave Pie after his café. The brand's name became a reference to the nursery rhyme – Sing a song of sixpence – “Four and twenty blackbirds; baked in a pie”. Soon Melbournites began to get the tasty treats; and a store and bakery were set up there. As time went on pies were delivered Australia wide; and became part of the footy culture. In 1960 it was sold to Peters Ice Cream, followed by other owners; it is now with Patties foods, whose Bairnsdale factory can produce 21,000 pies per hour, 24 hours a day.

[Source: *Australian food timeline*]

**Ken Macgregor** began making cakes, buns and pies in Melbourne, in the early 1950s. By **1954** the business moved to Perth and became known as “Bakewell Pies”. His son, Iain, followed into the family business taking over ownership in 1968 increasingly developing the distribution network, adopting new technology, and diversifying products. The company was rebranded to the **MRS MAC'S** name, and sells over 100 million pies, rolls and pasties in Australia and New Zealand; using approx. 4,800 tonnes of flour and 2,800 tonnes of beef each year.

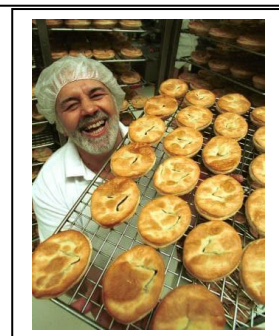
[Source: *www.mrsmacs.com.au*]

The multicultural nature of the pie was highlighted by the emergence of **VILI'S**. Vili's parents arrived in Adelaide in **1956** to escape the Hungarian revolution, carrying all their belongings in one old suitcase each, tied together with a belt, as did many refugees and displaced migrants from Europe. With a background of being chefs in Hungary, and an overpowering need to survive (no welfare or concessions back then), they began to establish their business. At the age of 14, Vili went to work at a local bakery to help support his family. Their business flourished, distributing their pies, pasties and sweets nationally and exporting to 24 countries in Asia, Europe and the Pacific.

[Source: *www.vilis.com*]

**HARRY'S CAFÉ DE WHEELS**, an icon in itself, began as a caravan café near Woolloomooloo naval dockyard, late **1930s** Depression days. Harry “Tiger” Edwards sold his “pie n’ peas” and crumbed sausages until enlisting in the AIF during WWII. On his return he re-opened the caravan as it was impossible to get a feed late at night. The name derived from the council requirement that mobile food caravans had to move at least 12 inches a day. Sold in 1975, with spreading fame it was visited by many celebrities:- Colonel Sanders,

Elton John, Frank Sinatra, and Marlene Dietrich to name a few. The first franchise opened in Newcastle 1998. It is believed to be the last tram on the Bondi - Sydney run. #1892 was rescued from a paddock in Rutherford, and refurbished by the Tramways Museum in Loftus, Sydney.



[Source: *harryscafedewheels.com.au*]

## LOCAL LEGENDS.

### MCEWANS BAKEHOUSE AT MARKS POINT.

George Boyd and other residents remember the pie cart coming to Swansea School in the 1940s at lunchtime to deliver pies, sausage rolls and buns. If the pie cart was not already at the school gate, the children would line up in eager anticipation. At first they would hear the horse clip-clopping over the Swansea Bridge; then when they spied the horse drawn cart, a great cheer would erupt from the expectant youngsters. Pupils would often buy a bun from the cart and then hollow it out whilst walking across Quinn Park. (The park didn't have a name then.) On the way, they would eat the delicious fresh soft bread from the middle as they walked to Weshe's shop, where they would buy hot chips to stuff inside. The shop was located in Belmont St., opposite the pool.

[Sources: McEwan family; George Boyd.]

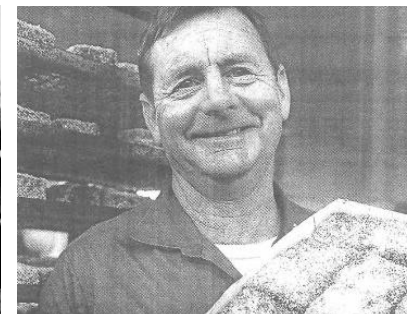


### THOMPSON'S BAKERY AND PIES: 6 GENERATIONS OVER 3 CENTURIES

Thompson's bakery was first established in Pit Town near Wallsend in 1891, after migrating from Warwickshire, England. A miner, Henry, sought a more enjoyable, alternative income. Producing eggs was not very successful, but Emma, his wife, began making cakes with the excess eggs. The miners loved them, so they set up a small bakery. They had 13 children and the family tradition of apprenticing the sons into the baking business began. Son, Percy, took over the business in 1921; and also set up his own bakery in Beach St, Belmont South in 1923. They lived on the Pacific Highway, and kept the horses in the backyard. At this time, bread was not allowed to be baked on weekends. His son, Colin, developed Pro-rol bread in 1952. In 1957 Thompsons were the first to produce cheap bread to be sold through supermarkets. Pro-rol was eventually bought out by Tip-Top, 1979. Percy's grandson, Garry, had joined the family business, as was the custom, delivering bread. Only 18, he was asked to bake some pies at Beach St, in 1961 to keep the licence current as bread was being baked elsewhere. Borrowing a bit of money from his mother for ingredients, he made 3 dozen pies and took them to Swansea Hotel for tasting, but proved to be too peppery. Batch 2 was successful, and began to divert customers from the neighbouring takeaway. The grumbling owner became his first commercial customer. And so Thompson's Pies was established, baking a range of 4 products – a meat pie, sausage roll, pastie and apple pie. His first oven was an 8-tray coke fired oven; and he would go to Catho pit and get scantling from the timber mill to fire the ovens. The site had a shop on the corner of the highway called Mary's; with the bakery behind it in Beach St (now B V Glass). The house next to that was an office in the early days, then stock room; and the shed down the back was the workshop for repairs of machinery and vehicles. The varieties soon expanded to 15 and the need for larger premises became very apparent. Land was purchased at Gateshead in 1986, and over 2 years a bakery was built while still baking at Belmont. Further extensions to Gateshead came in 1995. Garry's son and daughter; and granddaughter (5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> generation) now run the business, serving Newcastle, the Hunter and the Central Coast.



[Source: Thompson family]



## DARBY'S FRESH BAKE

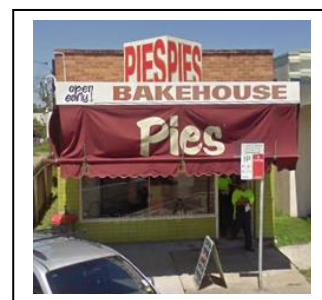
Named after it's first location in Darby St, this enterprise began in 1969 as a single shop "Darby's Pie Bar", a small store selling freshly baked pies; owned by Victor de Vries (now 70 years old) and wife, Helen. In 2001 a new team with new ideas, logos and marketing startegies launched the network of "Darby's Fresh Bake" that we know now. Focusing on the most popular lines, they found a niche in the fast food industry providing fast service and competitively priced baked goods. With 27 stores, they have expanded from Newcastle to the Central Coast, and Thornton and Rutherford; at one point even having a store in Penrith. The business is currently being restructured for the second time after encountering financial difficulties, and calling in administrators, as they did in 2001.

[Source: [darbypies.com](http://darbypies.com); Google]



## BARRY'S PIES – BLACKSMITHS.

A true local food outlet which has used an unchanged recipe for almost 40 years. Fresh bread, cakes and pies are baked on the premises daily. 24 varieties are currently on offer, - stroganoff, curry, chicken, pea and potato, kidney; even the rarely found gramma pies. Many older customers remember the rabbit pies from a very long time ago. Their left overs are generously donated to OzHarvest which gathers food and delivers it for free to charitable and welfare agencies.



## CORNISH PASTIES

The traditional pastie is filled with chunky vegetables (usually swede, potato, onion) and meat. Developed as a lunch for the tin miners of Cornwall (south-west England); the crimped edge of the distinctive, semicircular, insulating crust acted as a handle. The men worked long shifts underground. As their hands were dirty and covered with arsenic laden dust, the end corner that was held was then thrown away; usually down the mine as it was a superstition that the gremlins needed to be fed and appeased from causing accidents and mine collapses. Their wives would usually carve their initials in the crust so that they got the right pastie and ingredients; and the sprites knew who to protect. If they were cooked in the morning they usually remained warm for lunch. However, if they cooled down, they could be heated over a head-lamp candle. Some mines provided large warming ovens at the surface. Cornish pasties were a favourite for the miners at the Wallarah mine at Catherine Hill Bay, orders being placed in a room called "the Cabin". A slang term for the pastie is an "oggy", derived from its Cornish name, "hoggan". It is said that sometimes the Cornish miners wives would bring the sturdy, thickly crusted pasties to the top of the mine and shout down "Oggy, oggy, oggy". Upon receiving the miners' reply of "Oi, oi, oi" they would throw them down the shaft. Could this have been the beginnings of our great Aussie chant "Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi"?



[Source: [www.history.com](http://www.history.com)]

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**Please Note: This publication is compiled by HELM - the Heritage of East Lake Macquarie. We are passionate about sharing the culture and heritage of Swansea and surrounds. We would love to hear and share your stories. It is published independently of East Lake Macquarie Historical Society.**