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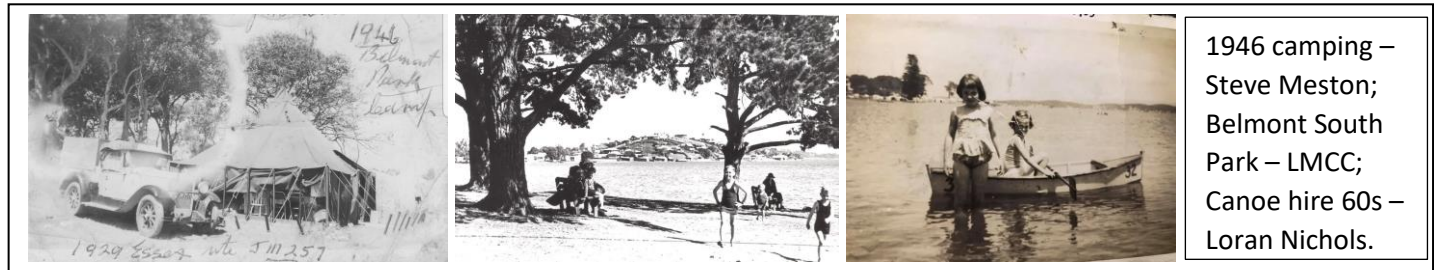
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GREAT MEMORIES

2023

A growing enthusiasm for recollections of the past, is enhanced by Lake Macquarie History, Heritage groups, facebook posts such as Growing up in Belmont, and local authors like Ernie Cox sharing photos and memories.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS – BELMONT SOUTH



Robert Stewart remembered on Growing up in Belmont Facebook: "... not too far was Belmont South waterfront through the 50-60's. Hive of activity back then. Four corner stores within 200 metres. Sandy shore, trees (still there), family's picnicking. (Brought their own food in picnic baskets) As a kid, I worked for Bert Cooper, hiring the canoes out. Collected coke bottles to return for 5d. Clear sandy bottom went out about 50 yards. Moored boats everywhere. Great fishing for whiting, bream etc. Prawn run from Cold Tea Creek, every summer." Others remembered white sand as far as you could walk out at Belmont South. Sometimes if you were unlucky you stood on a blue swimmer crab and paid the price of being nipped. Prawns could be collected by the bucketful (1-2 kg of schoolies) when the run was on, then taken back to camp to be cooked up. The canoes and paddle boats were firm favourites. Many kids pooled their money from collecting empty soft drink bottles to hire the canoes. Parents often watched from the shore or swam alongside, particularly with the younger ones. The shore announcer, equipped with a megaphone would call "Canoe No. 36 your time is up and it is time to come in." The call was repeated. If there was no response, another call was made to check to see if they were in trouble.

Many picnicked at the northern end of the park, just south of Cold Tea Creek. Some fished off the bridge, but sadly toadfish were the main catch of the day. Some of the lads would pinch them to make them puff up, then throw them under cars going past. Many drivers got out to check their tyres, thinking they had had a blowout. *Source: Growing up in Belmont Facebook.*



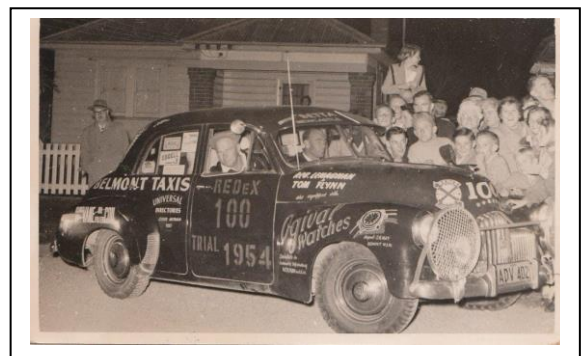
	
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Thank you to Pat Conroy and staff, kindly supporting our community; and encouraging the preservation and sharing of our heritage.

REDEX ROUND AUSTRALIA RELIABILITY TRIAL – THE BELMONT ENTRY

The first race was held in August **1953**, capturing the interest of motor sport fans worldwide. Over 200 amateur and professional drivers circumnavigated Australia in a variety of cars, most of which were not designed for the tough conditions. It was sponsored for the first 3 years by British Company, Redex, established in 1922 to supply fuel additives thought to extend the life of cars and improve performance. This was a time when the majority of Australia's roads either did not exist or were in poor condition – often just dusty tracks, not highways. There were few motels; and fuel stations were c. 1000 km apart in some regions. (Shell provided additional petrol dumps along the route.) Cars had to carry additional fuel drums, sand mats, shovels and picks, food and water between checkpoints. Rules did not allow modifications except auxiliary fuel tanks and more comfortable seats. Points were deducted for late arrival at checkpoints, disobeying instructions, changing parts during the race. 187 cars set off from Sydney Showground on their 6,500-mile journey up the east coast, over to Darwin, down to Adelaide, then via Melbourne back to Sydney. Over 150,000 people turned out to see them off. Amongst the drivers were “Gelignite” Jack Murray and Jack Brabham in Holdens; and winner Ken Tubman in a Peugeot. Very few finished with a clean sheet. Many brought back horror tales of tying up rear suspensions with tyre chains, living underground in Coober Pedy, jamming coir matting into the broken front end, stifling heat, and dust.

The following year was even bigger and better. **1954** saw the trial extended to 9,600 miles to the West Australian coast with a prize pool of £10,000 and 263 entries again setting off from Sydney Showground. This year witnessed 10 women participants; and one of our locals – Reg Lenaghan, owner of Belmont taxis, Holden entry. Cars were despatched every 2 minutes starting at noon. Reg's turn was at 3.20pm. “Gelignite” Jack Murray and Bill Murray were the winners. Jack earned his nickname through his habit of blowing up outback toilets. It was said he would also



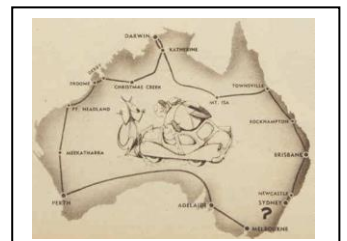
throw sticks of gelignite near cars he wanted to pass so that they would get out of the way.

Buoyed by her husband's enthusiasm, Elaine, also a cab driver, joined Reg Lenaghan in car #36 for the **1955** trial, but experienced mechanical problems. The unexpected winner that year was – Malcolm Brooks of Gosford in a Vanguard. Not daunted, Reg entered the **1956** Mobil Round Australia Trial, coming 26th from 83 starters in a Volkswagen. In Aug 1958, Elaine Lenaghan, entered a Holden, No 74, teaming up with Reg and Len, coming in 14th position after covering over 16,000 kms in 19 days. Only 34 of the 67 crews finished.

The **Australian Women's Weekly** entered an all-women crew in **1954** driving a Humber, No. 200, christened “Narda” after the heroine in the Mandrake comic. Helen, Nan, and Enid were ex-services women. They carried out a shake-down run from Sydney to Gympie (Qld.) and back. Enid drove the first leg to Newcastle, calling in



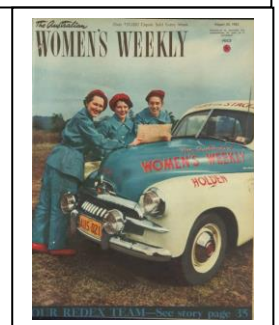
at her home in Woy Woy. They had to change a tyre slashed by blue metal at Bulahdelah; carry skid chains for ice; coir matting for bogs; and avoid livestock wandering on the road. On the actual trial they planned to wear white boiler suits, red and white checked shirts and red berets.



The journey's final stretch brought them through fog, slush, and snow over the Alps navigating hairpin bends and creek beds to finish in Sydney, conquering the Trial.



Filled with enthusiasm, Helen and Enid were joined by new member Betty in **1955**, in a Holden, again called “Narda”. Sadly, their adventure ended near Port Hedland WA with a holed radiator after hitting a rut 18” deep, covered in white dust. They tried to repair it with a first aid kit - plastic skin and bandages, but it failed. The Belmont Lenaghans offered their spare radiator, but as they were having radiator problems too, the Weekly team regretfully declined and did not finish.



Sources: Holts Auto; Women's Weekly; Wiki; Features; Growing up in Belmont FB.

PERCY'S AUTOS - GIBBOS, AUTO ELECTRICIANS, BELMONT

In his book, "Beautiful People of Belmont, NSW" Ernie Cox remembers taking his first car, a VW, to Percy Gibson for auto electrical work back in 1956. Percy started his business in September 1945, in a modest garage across the road from the current premises, with a capital of 20 pounds.



"When Percy Gibson arrived in Belmont and opened Gibson Auto Electrical back in 1945, the Auto Electrical trade was considerably different. A far cry from today's host of onboard electronics, diagnostics and safety features in vehicles. Back then, a vehicle's most complicated auto electrical issue would've been a faulty dynamo or starter motor; even alternators didn't exist until the '60s. Even then, Percy's diligent work, quality repairs and friendly manner with customers set the tone for the workshop's future."



Source: gibbos.com.au

His granddaughter, Cindy, is proud of her heritage. When Percy retired in 1976, his son Robert (Cindy's father) and wife Helen bought the business and carried on until they sold in 2000. Robert continued in a reduced role doing Rego inspections until 2014. After 40 years it was time for travelling.

Fond memories and stories about Percy, a very kind, friendly and generous man who loved to entertain, abound. "Mum told the story how she dropped in one afternoon hoping to get a rego check. The young man she approached went "mmm, errr" then Mr. Gibson bounced out of nowhere, said "Certainly, certainly!" and did it on the spot."

"I had an alternator that died and was a young bloke, no cash. Well, I only ever knew him as Gibbo and he fixed it and told me – fix me up when you can. That was about 50 years ago."

"I remember him dressing up as Santa and walking up and down Belmont at Christmas time spreading Xmas cheer."

"Once when my son was little, we ran into Santa Percy in Belmont and during the conversation Santa asked if I still lived in ... Street where my father lived. My son was gob smacked, as we walked away, he said mummy does Santa know you. I said Santa knows everyone. Kept the Christmas spirit for a long time."

"My father went to get his car rego check there about 50 years ago. One headlight wouldn't work, and Percy was fiddling with it and taking a long time. Dad needed the rego done straight away and said don't worry about it. He went somewhere else and got the check done and headlight fixed. A couple of weeks later he went back for wiring issues and Percy asked about his head light problem. Dad said it was a miracle. He switched on the lights and the broken one worked! Old Percy said it must be a miracle, the globe is still sitting over there on the bench."



When Cindy's mum, Helen, passed away, the shop was shut by the current owners and the staff all stood in full uniform at the back of the funeral.

"That's an incredible sign of respect to the family to do that." Cindy Gibson.
Sources: Ernie Cox; Gibbos; Growing up in Belmont & Surrounding Areas facebook.

GRACELANDS - BELMONT NORTH

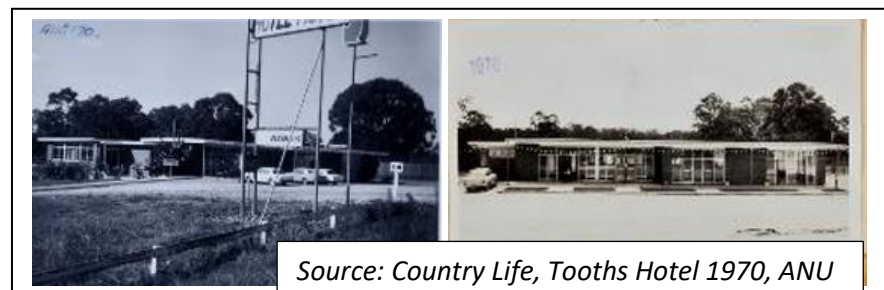
For 10 years Allan and Margaret Spencer lit up their Belmont North neighbourhood every December with an amazing Christmas lights show for the thousands of people who visited to view some 60,000 lights, model trains, reindeer on the roof, nativity scene in the garage, a giant 2 metre Santa, and much more.



While their light display was famous, not a lot is known about the Allan and Margaret story.

Margaret was born 90 years ago in 1933, to Lucy and Charlie Campbell in Stroud. Here she helped her parents with their dairy farms. She met Allan, who worked for her father, driving a milk truck making deliveries to Hexham. Their friendship grew and they were married in the Presbyterian Church in Stroud in 1951. They raised a family of 6 children – 3 girls and 3 boys.

Always hard workers, they were willing to take on opportunities. In 1955 they bought out the milk run in Stroud, which they operated until 1964. Another opportunity arose when the highway was being diverted through



Karuah. They bought land - 78 acres at Karuah, and built a motel and hotel, called "Country Life". Allan ran the hotel; Margaret juggled managing the motel with raising the children.

But both businesses were exhausting as they meant working seven days a week, leaving very little time for family. So they

leased the business and found another venture on the Central Coast collecting eggs from the local farms. Living at Budgewoi, they picked up the eggs twice a week and delivered them to Sydney to the Egg Board. Their next move was to Blacksmiths where Margaret began dabbling with Christmas lights to promote the season's cheer in the neighbourhood in a small way and continued to do so for 23 years.

Yet another chapter was about written. They bought a large block of land at Belmont North and their son-in law designed a home for them. Margaret became very ill in 1994, and Allan was determined that the dream home would be built. They were able to move in December 1996 and straight away Christmas lights were assembled. Each year they got bigger and better, taking some 2 months to plan, and set up. Many trips to America brought new decorations which needed special transformers and power points. Cherry pickers, ladders and scaffolding could be seen for weeks erecting the displays. Every year lights were repainted, broken ones replaced. Money raised from the wishing well and the selling of keepsakes like postcards, glow sticks and jewellery was donated to Westpac Rescue Helicopter, John Hunter Children's Cancer, and Police Rescue – a staggering \$350,000. The whole area became a tourist attraction, with thousands coming to the Christmas wonderland, often greeted by Allan and Margaret. Tourist buses arrived, ice cream vans came, traffic jams eventuated, Burke's Backyard filmed a TV segment, newspapers and magazines featured the amazing scenes that continued for 10 years. Sadly, Margaret's health began to fail and they could no longer continue after 2006. So that their legacy could continue the lights were donated to Hunter Valley Gardens, helping it grow into Australia's largest Christmas light show. The lights on Margaret's health began to dim and went out in 2013; but not before she left these generous words of wisdom:

"I just love watching the children's eyes light up when they see the lights, that's what Christmas is all about."

Sources: *Ernie Cox, Newcastleonhunter.org, Newcastle Herald, ANU.*

