


#52 Ancestors Week 39 - Map it Out

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I'm cheating a bit this week and reprinting my mother's detailed description of her childhood home, as told to me in her 94th year.

The house in Fitzroy St has gone completely. It is almost as though nothing was ever there. But it was a lovely old home once so come with me and I'll take you through the front gate and show you around.

The front path painted green sloped up slightly from the road and then flattened out. Over the picket gate was a trellis with honeysuckle and a red climbing rose called Black Boy. These two were responsible for the lovely perfume which everybody smelt as they neared our home. On either side of the path was a privet hedge and then lawn. The path wasn't very long to a step and then on to a wide opening on to the verandah. Either side of the opening there was timber so far, and then lattice. On the verandah, which was about 7 or 8 feet wide were an assortment of chairs – deck and cane with cane tables holding magazines and cups and saucers.

Directly opposite the front step was the front door and to the left of the door, the name "Roscrea" in gold letters on a black background. Roscrea is the old market town in the middle of Tipperary, Ireland, 2 miles from the Whitten family farm, "Fancroft" where my Irish grandfather, Anthony Whitten, was born.

Later our house was renamed, "The Meadows", by my mother but what happened to the nameplate "Roscrea" I do not know. I doubt if I even queried why it was changed. These sorts of things were just accepted by children; we weren't asked for our opinion. I wonder what my father thought for he would have been the one that had named it, no doubt as a tribute to his father who had come a long way to settle in a new land. Perhaps my father made a comment about it but as he only lived in the house at weekends he might have thought Mum should have right too. So, "The Meadows" it became and nothing was changed inside the house which was just as well.

At either end of the verandah were doors, one leading to the boys' room (the one on the left) and the one leading to the girls' room on the right.

On opening the front door, we step on a carpet runner which ran to the dining room, but on either side of the hall were two doors. One opened in to the guest bedroom and the other into the lounge room. More about those rooms later.

The phone was on the wall on the right just before the dining room and curtains, velvet I think, were parted just before stepping into the dining room.

This was a fairly narrow room and held a dining table which could be made larger by inserting "leaves". There were about 8 chairs – like the table they were made of oak. At the end of this room was an open fireplace with a few easy chairs grouped about. Also this room contained a cabinet which contained a wireless. This was a present from a Methodist minister to Mum for minding his young son while his wife was in Sydney for an operation.

Over the fireplace, high up on the wall were nicely framed photographs of Dad's parents, Anthony and Charlotte Whitten and on the mantelpiece were photos of family and relatives. One was of my American cousin Maurice whom I would eventually meet in the 1980s.

Halfway along the wall was a small window where food could be passed from the kitchen. At the fireplace end, there was a door leading out to a verandah room, and at the other end, (off the hallway) another door which led into a room which was separate until Mum knocked out the wall between it and the lounge room, making it all one big room. There was carpet on the dining room floor and a door at the hallway end which led into the kitchen.

The kitchen was large, as most kitchens were in those days. This house had been an old farm house in the early days. Fitzroy St was one of the earliest streets laid out in Quirindi and was named after Governor Fitzroy. There are Fitzroy Sts everywhere, including Dubbo where Fitzroy St is only a few hundred yards up the road from my home.

Mum spent a lot of time in the kitchen and no wonder as it was cold where we lived and she had a fuel stove to warm up the room. In the summer time the trees and shrubs allowed it to cool off after she let the stove go out during the afternoon.

At the eastern end of the kitchen was the fuel stove, a "Beacon Light" with a lighthouse on the door to the firebox. Sitting on the top of the stove were about six kettles including a little black one which Mum used to put into a hold at the top for a quick boil. Also there was a big black fountain which sat at the side and always had hot water in it. My mother used this water for washing up. To the right of the stove was a tap which came through the wall from a tank. This was where my father sat and bathed my face after I got thrown off the horse. There was a window ledge above the tap where Mum's numerous cats sat and waited to be fed.

Off to the right was a pantry where the washing up was done. It had benches for dishes and shelves for tinned foods, sauces, jams etc. Mum always kept a good larder because she was a long way from town and if anyone popped in she could be prepared.

There was a big kitchen table and chairs in abundance. There were smaller tables under the window or serving into the dining room. On these tables were big meat covers and dishes. Over the fireplace was a shelf for holding canisters and a big clock was in the middle of the shelf.

At the other end of the room was a kitchen cabinet which held the usual kitchen cups, saucers and plates, glasses, vases, kitchen tablecloths, milk jug covers and meat dishes and other odds and ends used in a kitchen. The kitchen had lino on the floor and a calendar or

two on the wall – calendars were given out at Christmas time by all the shops so one ended up with an assortment.

There was a still life print of fruit on one of the walls and on one of the tables was an electric jug and a toaster which Mum only used if the fire went out. The numerous kettles kept the tea cups filled with tea on and off all day and the toast was made sitting in front of the fire. At the beginning of the week and during the week there was ample short wood for the stove but if Mum ran out of these she'd pull half a tree into the kitchen and prop it up on chairs. The lino always had holes from sparks and Mum always had bruises on her legs as the tree slowly got closer to the fire.

The back door of the kitchen led out to an enclosed porch where there was a drip safe and ferns and then about four big steps down to the ground again. The back yard was enclosed by a wire netting fence to keep the chooks out and there were gates at each end; one led down to the lavatory and the other out to a driveway.

Not far from the back steps was an old dairy which Dad used to store chook feed etc and off this was the laundry.

Mrs Passfield did Mum's washing and ironing. The laundry had an uneven floor and must have taxed her. The copper was where clothes were boiled up and then they were hauled out of it by a clothes prop and into a tub to be rinsed and then to another for bluing and then rinsed again before hanging out.

Back to the kitchen. There was another door which led out of the kitchen and into the bathroom. This room only had one window in it and was fairly dark. There was a wash stand with a big jug and bowl and a chip heater which had to be lit after the chips were set alight. We had a white enamel bath and a linen press in this room too. There was a door off this room which led into Mum and Dad's bedroom and a door from this room which led back into the girls' room. (which led off the front verandah).

In both Mum and Dad's room and the girls' room there was lino on the floors with mats. Three single beds were in the girls' room and two wardrobes and a dressing table. In Mum and Dad's room was a double bed, wardrobe and dressing table and easy chairs.

The boys' room had beds, wardrobe, dressing table and chairs.

The guest room was rose coloured. It was Mum's pride and joy. It had an open fireplace, however I don't remember fires in it. A wardrobe, cane chair and eiderdown (all rose coloured) and of course cream curtains and end ones rose coloured – the lamp was also rose covered and with dangling thin tassels all around. Bill used to call it "The Encircling Gloom" – however it was Mum's pride and joy and she was very happy when couples were using it. Bill and I got to use it when we came home from our honeymoon – at last, at last, I was in the rose room!



Mum and her sister Joan with their parents at "The Meadows" - about 1941