

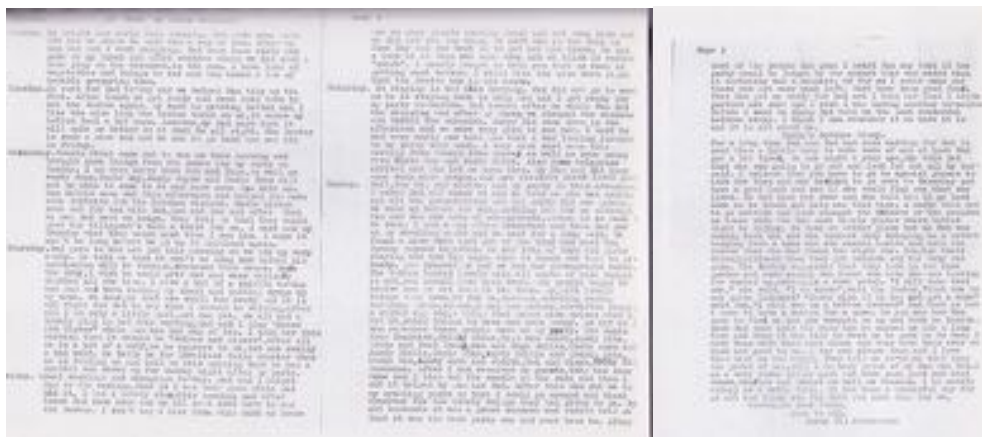
## HOMES AND HEARTHS: GROWING UP IN MAITLAND IN THE 1950s & 1960s

Apart from the donation by myself and sisters, Ann Dent and Jane Cummings, of a set of Charles Blackman prints to the Maitland Regional Art Gallery, and my parents' and Mallaby grandparents' plaques in the Columbarium at St Mary's Anglican Church, there is nothing in Maitland to mark the thirty years that my grandfather George Mallaby owned the pharmacy at 455 High Street and the following three decades that Rex and Phemie Wallis owned (and worked in) the same pharmacy (1948 to late 1970s). Nothing to mark that family tradition. The talk to the Maitland & District Historical Society was given in their memory on 7 December 2021.

### INTRODUCTION

The past is slippery – now-you-see-it-now-you-don't – and like many people, I find trying to fix it a frustrating process. As Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton have written, memory is a personal activity, but once shared across generations, memories become collective remembering. It is through such collective memories that we structure our world and understand our past.

Not long after I was born, my father Rex embarked upon a letter-writing project. Each week he typed a letter – on onion skin paper, in triplicate – purportedly from me about my daily doings, to my two sets of grandparents. I have the third copy, and if the ink is a little faded, and they are hard to read, they nevertheless form an invaluable resource that contributes to my family's store of collective memories.



Excerpt from 'My Week', 6 July 1946

An essay by Australian author Ruth Park – 'This way to the spangly gloom', April 1999, (reproduced in *The Australian Author Commemorative Issue*, Vol.50, No.2, 1969-2018, 2018, p.72) – gives food for thought when compiling one's own story. Park insists an autobiographer must turn a searchlight into 'unexpected places and obscure recesses – the 'sealed rooms in your memory' – to tell the truth. But what is 'the truth'? Truth for one person is perhaps different for others – even within the same family. My 'truth' centres around growing up in a socially and professionally ambitious family, of 100% British origin. The three pillars of our existence were: Queen Elizabeth II; the Church of England and Robert Menzies. Others will have different 'truths' but all contribute to the rich social fabric of Maitland.

If Brenda Niall structured her biography of the Boyd family of artists, musicians and architects, around the houses in which they lived, I call on the three Maitland homes occupied by the Wallis family to encompass the phases of our lives. All are solid brick dwellings, still standing despite the vicissitudes of time and climate. There is a fourth 'home' – the pharmacy at 455 High Street – plus two holiday cottages with walk-on parts: one a modest house on the foreshores of Lake Macquarie near Toronto, bought by my parents

### A FEW WORDS ABOUT MYSELF

I was born on 8 July 1945 at the War Memorial Hospital in Waverley, Sydney – neither ‘war baby’, nor ‘baby-boomer’. In 1944, when my parents were about to marry, accommodation in Sydney was difficult. However, the threat of invasion after the attacks by Japanese midget submarines in Sydney Harbour saw many people flee the bayside suburbs. Undeterred, my mother found a good flat at a reasonable rent in Rose Bay, just off New South Head Road. We lived there until I was around two years of age.

I was perhaps destined to take over the pharmacy in High Street after my parents and successfully undertook a B Pharm at Sydney University. But ultimately, I opted for a different path as an author and art historian. I gained a PhD in Creative Writing after Master’s and Bachelor’s Degrees in Art History and Theory and have written several biographies, including a memoir, *Alpine Beach: A Family Adventure* (1999) – about the decade I and my husband and two children, Zeke and Zali, spent in the French Alps; a family history series about parents, grandparents and great-grandparents; plus the biography *A Most Generous Scholar: Joan Kerr, Art and Architectural Historian*, which resulted from my successful PhD thesis and was a Non-Fiction winner in the 2013 Society of Women Writers NSW Book Awards.

### BACK TO THE BEGINNING OF MY CONNECTION TO MAITLAND

In the late 1830s my father’s forebears – the Wallis, Hawkins, Smith, Crossingham and Cameron families – sailed from Britain to the fledgling colony of NSW, barely fifty years old at the time, to start a new life. In my mother’s family the Mallabys (from Yorkshire) and the Scottish/Irish Gilmours arrived in the 1880s – the first to settle in Armidale, the second in Mount Pleasant Street, Maitland. Grandfather George Mallaby bought the pharmacy at 455 High Street in 1921 and acquired the house *Mouraby* at 1 The Avenue, Lorn. My parents Phemie Faith Gilmour Mallaby and Robert Rex Wallis met while studying pharmacy at Sydney University in the 1930s. They married in February 1944 at St Mary’s Church of England, Maitland. After Rex was demobilised in 1947 following service in New Guinea with the 2/5 AGH, they moved to Maitland with two young daughters to take over the pharmacy.

in the early 1950s, and a second built around 1956-57 above Dutchman’s Beach, Port Stephens.



LEFT: George Wallis with my father’s older brother Stan in front of the family home in 1916 in Nabitac. RIGHT: my aunt Stella Wallis with my mother Phemie Mallaby and grandparents Fred and Henrietta Wallis, late 1930s-early 1940s.



*Great-grandfather George and Elizabeth Wallis and their family  
(taken from an A3 photocopy)*

It was George's father, John Wallis, his wife Sophia (nee Hawkins) and her extended family who left their village of Burwash in East Sussex in 1838 on *The Neptune*. On their arrival in the Hunter the men were given jobs on properties around Maitland, but once they had some capital behind them, they moved north to the Manning and Wallamba Rivers districts where they bought land, especially around Nabitac where my father Rex Wallis was born in 1915. FIND THE CROSSINGHAMS

John Burgess Smith and Elizabeth Ann Cameron arrived as adolescents with parents – John and Mary Smith from Beckley (also in Sussex) on the *Palmyra* (1838); and Samuel Cameron and his wife Catherine McDonald from Cromarty, Scotland, on the *Asia* in 1939. They too settled in the lower Hunter Valley, but I have lost all trace of them.

Like many others, 'my' families settled on farms and in nascent villages, some with approximations of Aboriginal names like Canningalla, Killawarra, Wollamba and Dungog, others more prosaically called after places 'back home' or Englishmen of passage: Berry Park, Lansdowne, Clarkson's Crossing, Miller Forest and Harrington Bar; or a compromise – Duck Hole and Dingo Creek.

When I was at school in the 1950s, Australian history was based mostly on the tribulation and triumphs of overland explorers and pioneer settlers. The confrontations between ever-expanding white settlements and resident Indigenous groups were not mentioned. When the common law arrived with the First Fleet, the Aborigines became subjects of the Crown and in theory protected by that law. 'In practice' was another matter. To the original owners of the land, the progress of settlement was like an advancing flood wrecking their way of life.

Now I wonder what potential settlers about to leave the British Isles knew of all this, including settler deaths. Very little, one supposes, in the face of the enthusiasm shown by immigration agents eager to 'sell' New South Wales as the land of opportunity. In early nineteenth-century Britain, ownership was transformed from the old idea of land – the commons and fens, plus pastures previously available to Celtic-speaking highlanders – being used by different people, to one of exclusive property rights for the upper

classes.<sup>1</sup> In New South Wales these landless immigrants had been promised property of their own for the first time in their lives, and they wanted full control of it.<sup>2</sup>

This is something I still need to pursue – with a mix of pride and apprehension.



*Left: Faith (Furness) Mallaby with daughters Emma and Ethel and youngest children, Faith and Cliff  
Right: John, George and Hedley*

The Mallabys lived in Markham Street Armidale. George Chapman Mallaby ran a successful soap factory. He was also very musical and built an organ in a local church. Three of his sons played string instruments, including my grandfather George, daughter Ethel the piano and youngest daughter Faith studied singing at the Sydney Conservatorium.



*The family of Sarah and James Gilmour*

Their daughter Phemie Vera Gilmour (b.1889; long white dress, left side of photo), my maternal grandmother, was nursing in Tamworth when she met young pharmacist George Mallaby (b.1888). They married in St Mary's Church Maitland, on 12 September 1912.

<sup>1</sup> Reynolds, *Frontier*, p.190.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur, pp 67, 69.



*Wedding photo, Phemie Vera Gilmour and George Mallaby*

My mother, Phemie Faith Gilmour Mallaby, was born in 1915 in Tamworth but lived in Maitland from the age of five. She was captain of Maitland Girls' High School in 1933; Senior Swimming Champion – three years running: from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> year. Helped – according to family legend – by her grandfather James Gilmour using tough love at the Mallaby's holiday house on the shores of Lake Macquarie to teach the children to swim. He apparently took them in a rowboat a little way out on the lake and ordered them to swim to shore!



*Back row: Winsome, Joyce, Joan, Phemie Faith & George*



*Grandparents George & Phemie Vera Mallaby  
Back row: Winsome, Joyce, George, Phemie Faith & Joan*



*Phemie & Rex Wallis, c.1942-1945.*



*Wedding Photo, 19 February 1944*



*Phemie & Rex's marriage certificate*

It will become clear a little later in my talk as to why many Wallis family documents look like this – although some of the audience for my talk might have already guessed.



*Phemie and Susan, Rose Bay, c. October 1945*





Phemie, Rex & Susan



Susan with Grandparents Henrietta & Frederick Wallis 1945/1946)  
c.1947

Rex would take me to watch the flying boats take off and land in Rose Bay. I loved being out and about, ever curious about the world around me.

Early details and image of the pharmacy at 455 High Street



George Mallaby's Certificate: Licence to sell poisons (Certificate of Registration  
Pharmacy Board of NSW, c.1905-1907

In 1947-48, Rex was getting ready to have his own business when the offer of Mallaby's pharmacy in Maitland came up.



*Interior of 455 High Street, 1950—1960s*



*Exterior, 2021*

Rex began a trial period in 1948 and in January 1949 a formal agreement was drawn up between George Mallaby and Robert Rex Wallis concerning the lease of the pharmacy with the right to purchase the business and real estate when George decided to sell. Initially, George retained the use of the office and a key and could thus enter the premises at any time to conduct his own business affairs and practise optometry. My grandfather was understandably reluctant to make a clean break with the business that had been his life for so many years. Yet it must have been quite difficult for Rex, a newcomer to the town (even though members of his family had lived in the district for years), to have his father-in-law an ongoing presence in the pharmacy.



*Agreement signed between George Mallaby & Rex Wallis (c.1948)*

Phemie arrived in Maitland by train late in 1947, with two-year-old me and baby Ann on a pillow on her lap. We settled in at *Mouraby* with her parents George and Phemie Vera Mallaby. They soon moved

to their house at Carey Bay on Lake Macquarie.<sup>3</sup> It was to be a temporary arrangement until Phemie and Rex could buy their own house.



*Home No. 1: Mouraby, 1 The Avenue, Lorn (2021)*

At a writing workshop a few years ago, participants were encouraged to do a memory prompt by trying to picture the first kitchen they could remember. I imagined the kitchen in my grandparents' house in The Avenue.

I remember black and white tiles on the kitchen walls. A row of earthenware canisters for flour, sugar and tea sat on a shelf above the Kooka stove. There was a large walk-in pantry to the right of the kitchen – off limits to small curious hands. In the back garden there was a lemon tree, a rusting iron incinerator, choko vines covering the wooden fence, and passionfruit claiming an old disused dunny in the back corner. There was also a garage-cum-workshop (Grandfather George was a talented carpenter) at the end of two parallel lines of cement running alongside the house to the front gate.



*Susan, Ann & George Mallaby at Mouraby*

<sup>3</sup> Phemie F was not exactly sure if they had already moved to Carey Bay and had returned to Maitland to be with her and the children. It would have been a bit daunting for her on her own – presumably without a car. Rex was still in the army.

I attended the Kindergarten in Cathedral Street, Maitland in its very early days. Here again, I have a memory trace of afternoon naps on rough canvas stretchers, and the cold, damp smell of a huge wooden box in which blocks of cold slimy craft clay were kept.



*Kindergarten in Cathedral Street; random images of childhood*

The image top right reminds me of a childhood incident. I remember quite clearly a family picnic to Red Head Beach when I was three or four. While the grown-ups were talking, I decided to walk back to our car behind the dunes to collect the old dipper that had been allocated as my beach bucket. Once my absence was noticed, my parents fanned out searching frantically for me on the shore and in the water. I arrived with dipper and wondered what the fuss was about. An early example of rugged individualism and independence.

I remember being woken in the night and taken, with Ann, to great-aunt Lilian's house in Telarah during the 1949 flood. I was supposed to go to Maitland Hospital to have my tonsils removed but the flood intervened. (I still have those tonsils!) My mother often worked in the pharmacy, so we had a regular housekeeper who taught me to read at around three years of age. I remember walking from The Avenue to Nillo Infants' School, which I attended from 1950-1952.

When I was about seven or eight (Ann two years younger) Rex would take us to swimming lessons at Maitland Baths, the beginning of a lifelong love of the water. I was a robust energetic child, never the best at sports but an eager participant.



Mouraby at Carey Bay, Lake Macquarie  
Images 1&2: Early 1920s

Image 3: 2020

We often spent Christmas Day at Carey Bay with the Mallaby grandparents. There must have been sad times on the anniversaries of the death of their son George, of which we children were unaware. But that is the nature of childhood and perhaps that carefree lack of awareness brings comfort to grandparents. I remember being there with our Avard cousins, Sandra, George and Gai from Gunnedah. Later, when they moved from South Australia to Newcastle, the Hissey cousins – Ian, Lloyd and Leonie – were also there to contribute to the rowdy games in and around the lake's foreshore, myself the eldest of the band.

One enduring memory of staying at 'The Lake' – as we always called it – is of sleeping in the wide, closed-in front verandah on a huge over-stuffed lounge: a behemoth with a grey and black velour covering that, to me, looked like elephant hide. I remember being woken to the carolling of magpies outside and the sun streaming through the slats in the heavy wooden Venetian blinds, and grandfather George bringing me a mug of strong, sweet black tea and a thick slab of bread and butter.

The space that captured my imagination so strongly that I can no longer distinguish fact from fiction was the timber hat stand near the front door that had been set up as a shrine to their son George whose Liberator bomber was shot down over the Bay of Benghazi in July 1942. His name is on the Alamein Memorial, El Alamein War Cemetery (at Marsa Matruh) in Egypt but without a grave at which my grandparents could mourn that modest piece of furniture became George's memorial.

Phemie told me that Rex adapted well to the pharmacy in Maitland, considering his family were mostly country, not professional, people (except for his uncle Arthur Phillip who was an Anglican priest). Phemie told me that Rex had had valuable experience with the 2/5 AGH in New Guinea, especially in the dispensary with D John Belisario.



*Home No.2: 1, Nillo Street*

Phemie and Rex Wallis must have bought this house in 1950-51 because my younger sister Jane (born April 1952) was a very young baby there. We lived in this house until around 1954.



*Nillo Infants' School*

I started my kindergarten year in 1950 at Nillo Infants School, not far away in Belmore Road, and completed 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class there (1951 & 1952). If I close my eyes, I can see the playground with the monkey bars.

I was always reading: under the bedclothes, in the bath, walking to school, wedged down behind armchairs – ‘just one more chapter please’. When my mother bought books as Christmas presents for cousins, I insisted on reading them before she wrapped them up. At the age of five or six, I won a prize at Maitland Library for having borrowed the most books for a particular period.

The house, in Nillo Street, Lorn is a modest red-brick bungalow with a small garden in the front and a flat back yard. Rex used to develop the films that customers left at the pharmacy in a darkroom in the garage at the end of a long narrow driveway. I remember the bedrooms either side of the hallway at the front of the house, the kitchen, dining room and bathroom at the back. I spent dreamy hours in the fork of a huge old orange tree at the side of the house. We had a succession of black kelpies. However since they were never on a leash nor kept in an enclosure, and being sheep dogs, they rounded up cars with unfortunate consequences.

There was an ornamental grapevine covering a trellis across the back of the house. I hated the fat green grubs that used to feast on it and fall to the ground only to be squashed underfoot. I was the one who made up the games for the neighbourhood children, my younger sister Ann following gamely. I wrote plays about adventures in far-distant lands and tried my hand at commerce, selling badly made dolls’ clothes out in front of the house, plus a kind of sour lemonade, much to my mother’s embarrassment. She was the one in the family who cared what the neighbours thought.

Winters were colder, and summers hotter then. We cooled off under the sprinkler hose; ate the fat juicy yellow peaches my mother bottled (using her Fowler’s Vacola preserving kit and pressure cooker) and chunks of watermelon sitting on the front step.

One day, I remember becoming very angry with my mother and sister. In my heightened imagination I felt that no one loved me; that I must have been adopted. So I decided to run away.

I set out with my black kelpie, Kimmy, to go? Where? The day was hot, but my rage soon cooled. I only made a few hundred yards before Kimmy and I settled in a shady hole at the base of a neighbour’s hedge to contemplate our situation. Kimmy was glad of the attention and settled on my lap to snooze, checking every few minutes that I was still stroking his silky ears.

The afternoon advanced, the sun was sinking. and I was hungry and my legs were stiff from sitting still under the weight of the dog. Kimmy yawned and stretched and let me know he wanted to move. We sat there for a few more minutes as the sun sank further in the western sky.

‘Come on Kimmy. We’d better go home.’

After the success of pharmacist Ken Tubman in the first Round Australia Redex Car Trial in 1953, small local trials became popular. Having learnt to drive in her early teens (there had been fierce competition between Phemie and her older sister Joyce to see who could drive from Maitland to Carey Bay the fastest!), my mother was a good driver and tried her hand at a rally.

Phemie devised an ingenious method for keeping within the designated speed limit and therefore stage time limit, because the speedo was covered up. In those days the windscreen wipers oscillated at a speed in keeping with that of the car. Phemie practised 60 mph with the windscreen wipers on and kept a mental note of their rhythm. It worked! She won her category.

During this time my parents bought a small cottage on the waterfront near Toronto on Lake Macquarie – perhaps at my mother’s urging as she had spent so many childhood holidays nearby at Carey Bay. (Rex, a country boy, was not so much at home at The Lake.)



*Susan and Ann at holiday cottage on the Lake Macquarie waterfront near Toronto*

The house was of simple weatherboard with a wide verandah around three sides (we girls slept in a closed-in section); a chip heater in the bathroom. The block sloped steeply at the back. First thing Rex had to do on arrival was mow the grass.

Phemie and Rex began to think about a bigger, more substantial home. I remember my mother wanting to have the house in Nillo Street looking nice to show prospective buyers, and so put a special-occasion lace bedspread on the bed in the spare room. Fascinated, I followed Mum and the real estate around and made comments about the new bedspread – and got my ears tweaked.

I attended Maitland Primary School (1953-1956: 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class). Ann soon followed the same schooling pattern.



*Class Photos: 1954, 1955, 1956  
Maitland Primary School, Church Street*

I remember some of the faces although I might not recognise any of them now. Most of their names escape me. Apart from being lefthanded – and the constant (ultimately futile) harassment from teachers to make me change – I found school relatively easy and did well, helped in no small part by the number of books I read from an early age. After school I often walked up Church Street to the pharmacy where I was put to work soaking labels off medicine bottles and unpacking orders. Because I had a working mother, I didn't know that women, especially middle-class women, were not supposed to have paid jobs. Nor did I realise later when I arrived at Women's College, that many girls had had to fight to attend university. In my family, it was assumed that if intellectually capable all offspring – girls and boys – would go.



*Home No.3: Glastonbury, 28 Addison Road, Bolwarra (Cnr Bayswater Road)*

The Wallis family moved to Bolwarra (although Ann and I continued our schooling at Maitland Primary School in Church Street) when Phemie and Rex bought the graceful old Federation house named *Glastonbury* by my Anglophile father, at 28 Addison Road Bolwarra, sometime in 1953/54. It had earlier belonged to the family of the architect Ian Pender who was married to my mother's sister Winsome Mallaby (in fact the Penders might have built it). We were certainly well established in this house by the time of the February 1955 flood. More of that later.

It was a wonderful semi-rural neighbourhood in which to grow up. After school and at weekends the children who lived in and around Addison Road would race their bicycles up and down the street. Away from prying adult eyes we constructed billycarts from old crates and pram wheels and held competitions in the grassy gully on the other side of Bayswater Road. The aim was to go as fast as possible down the hill to see how far we could get up the other side. Just two of the potentially dangerous activities available to children in the 1950s.

The house was on a double block of land and we had a pet sheep (called Woolly) to keep the grass down. It didn't matter to Dad if she nibbled Mum's prize shrubs but when she ate Dad's beans, in went wire protections for the plants. We had a large chook yard and I used to enjoy talking to a favourite bronze bantam hen. There was a fig tree nearby and I vividly remember my father shooting sparrows with his air rifle, the family cat lying in wait for a tasty snack.

One hot summer I had the bright idea of digging a swimming pool on the spare block and co-opted the local children. We got as far as a two-metre square hole and, not wanting to wait for any sort of lining, filled it and splashed around in the muddy water. However when we began to enlarge the 'pool' we unearthed several dead chooks my father had buried in that part of our grounds. Needless to say we lost all interest in the project until my understandably cranky father ordered us to fill it in.

Rather than the energetic kelpies and border collies we had in Lorn (all of which came to grief on the busy road), we had a collie, a corgi and several Persian cats.

## THE 1955 FLOOD

Luck was on Phemie and Rex's side. Firstly, they had moved to *Glastonbury* on higher ground in Bolwarra and sold their house in Nillo Street Lorn as being in a flood free zone (the house was subsequently inundated with nearly two metres of water), and they had just taken delivery of a new car. 'The old brown one was in Simms Brothers showroom and finished up in St Andrews Street, in the mud,' Phemie liked to recount.

The pharmacy received some floodwater (I think, mainly water surging down High Street when the Hunter River overflowed its banks by many metres), enough to ruin the floor and its coverings. All the documents, certificates and items held in the big green safe in Rex's office received a good coating of flood mud.

Phemie Wallis showed remarkable composure under extremely difficult conditions. An American couple were in the district at the time – the husband held a senior position at the Bradford cotton mills – and their accommodation was threatened by the floodwaters. Phemie took them and their maid in and gave them her bedroom. The husband cut some wood – there was no electricity (Phemie only had the old fuel stove in the ironing room to cook on) – and broke a downpipe to get some water, otherwise, Phemie told me, 'they treated *Glastonbury* as a hotel'. We had to get most of our water from the bore at Logan's Dairy (there is a reference to Hand's Dairy in the history of Bolwarra School: an ancient brick and slate dairy and a barn of comparable age), Phemie transporting water containers in Jane's stroller. Friends from Lorn sent their three boys plus an elderly aunt out to *Glastonbury*, the youngest of them still in nappies and on bottles. Added to this [menagerie!] was a pregnant Maisie Johnston with two young children. In all there were around fifteen of us sleeping in nearly all rooms in the house.

Although it meant considerable responsibility for Phemie, the children, including myself, thought it a great adventure – playing endless games of snap, making card castles that covered the entire lounge-room floor, and of course, no school. Ann and I and the two older boys from Lorn slept in chairs pushed together in the lounge room. There was little water for washing and the increasingly ragged band of urchins roamed free.

The sight of raging muddy water storming across the Maitland farmlands has stayed with me all my life: the rank smell of mud, the sound like surf, day and night. I remember being amazed that some chooks on the roof of a shed next to a house in the path of the destruction just below Bolwarra survived.

Telephone lines were down. For a week Phemie did not know where Rex and Col Johnston were, let alone if they were safe. Later we found out that Rex slept in the pharmacy and that he and Dr Frank Bonar delivered medical supplies in a rowing boat.

The little general store on the main road ran out of food and since there were several hundred people sheltering in the school, food drops were frequent. Ann put a white cross out on the road – for an airdrop of bananas from a helicopter – just to see what would happen. Our mother was mortified!

Phemie couldn't remember much about what we ate (probably tinned food; there was very little fresh). The Americans had brought a ham, but the cooking was up to Phemie. She became quite annoyed with the couple from Lorn for imposing on her generosity. Their house wasn't flooded and they didn't come and get their children as soon as the water went down. 'I more or less had to send them home,' Phemie said.

Another person who imposed on Phemie was a local doctor's wife. She rang to ask if my mother could drive into Lorn and put items in her house up high out of reach of the flood. (I think they were away on holidays at the time.) Phemie moved what she could but without help much of the furniture was too heavy to shift. The river situation was dire and she only just made it back to Bolwarra before the Hunter River broke its banks below Bolwarra Hill. Over the years I have wondered what would have happened to us all in *Glastonbury* if she hadn't made it home since there was no other functioning adult to take

charge. Later, that doctor's wife complained that Phemie had forgotten to move her shoes and they were all ruined.

I remember the first trip into Maitland after the floodwaters subsided – on foot, in gumboots – wading through the fine, silky milk-chocolate stinking flood mud. Because Belmore/Paterson Road was impassable, to return to school at first we had to be driven via outlying villages – at least an hour instead of ten minutes.

The town recovered as best it could and we resumed our ordinary lives. There were plans to move residents from low-lying areas of West Maitland and it was quite a common sight in the ensuing years to see weatherboard houses (or half houses if they were large) balanced precariously on the backs of huge flatbed trucks, trundling down the main street on their way to higher ground.



*Governor's visit: The 1956 reception for Governor Northcott for RSL/Legacy*

Rex became involved in civic affairs. When he was President of Hunter Legacy the governor came to town to open the new RSL sub-branch headquarters in High Street. Rex and Phemie hosted a reception for the Governor of New South Wales, (Lieut-General Sir John Northcott, KCMG, KCVO, CB) at *Glastonbury*, on Saturday 26 May 1956. Ann and I were allowed to meet the Governor – but on pain of death to behave!

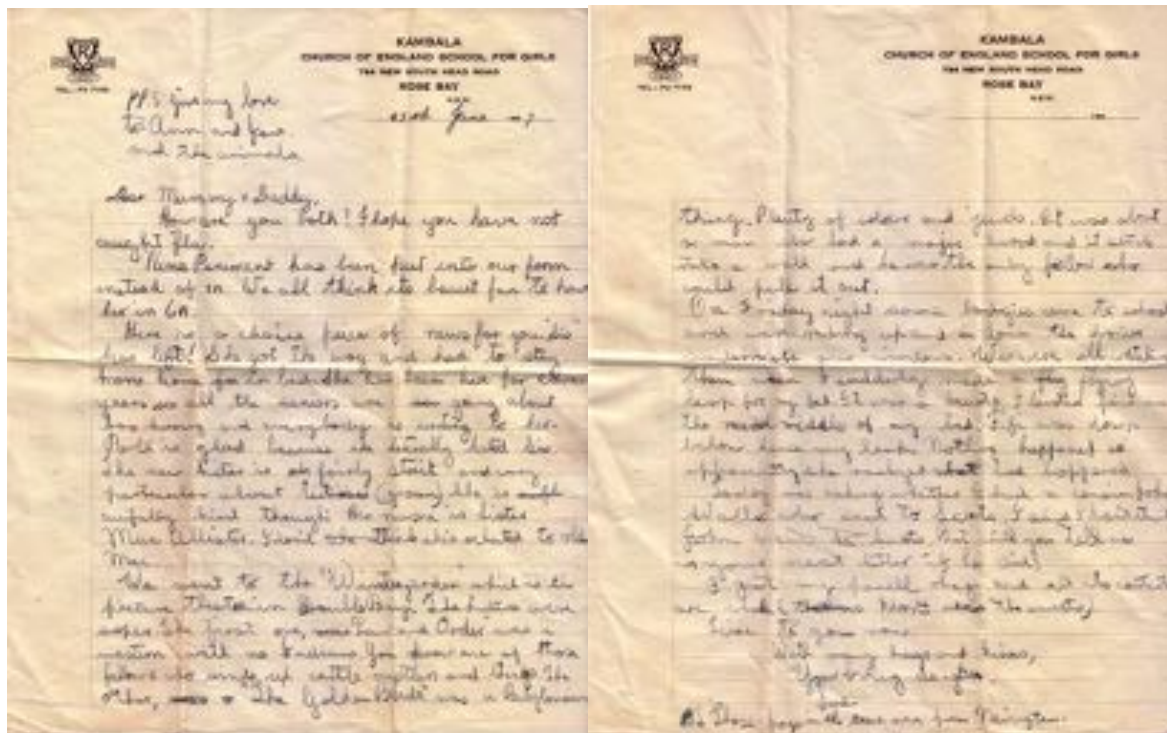
When Phemie and Rex were living in Rose Bay they often saw groups of pupils from Kambala Church of England School for Girls in their grey uniforms. Although Phemie had had a good education at Maitland Girls High School, and Rex a pretty good one at Fort Street Boys' High in spite of his restlessness, they decided that their three daughters would attend Kambala as boarders.



*My confirmation, August 1956*

In time-honoured tradition, I was confirmed at St Mary's Church of England before leaving for school in Sydney. At Kambala the boarders went to communion at St Michael's Vacluse one Sunday a

month. As the youngest confirmee in my first year there, I had to walk with the headmistress – the august Miss Fifi Hawthorne. In senior school she taught us Latin and Religion – Caesar's Gallic Wars and the bible with equal severity.



*Letters home. Sunday afternoon the boarders had to sit in a classroom and write letters.*

I started at Kambala in 1957, completing the Leaving Certificate there in 1962. Ann attended Kambala from 1960-1964. This meant a significant change in the rhythm of the family, with home life as we had known it now limited to several weekends each term and school holidays.

During the holidays I often roamed High Street, particularly attracted to Wilks' Record Store, where I could look through the racks of Country-Western LPs such as Frank Ifield's Greatest Hits, albums by Johnny Cash, Jimmy Little (A Tree in the Meadow), Slim Dusty (Greatest Country and Western Hits), AND 45s of the latest rock and roll by Elvis, Roy Orbison, the Everly Brothers, Brenda Lee, Paul Anka, the Kingston Trio, Laurie London (He's got the whole world in his hands), Barry Maguire (the Eve Of Destruction), Allan Sherman, Dave Brubeck, Bobby Darin.

Before the advent of television, I listened religiously to the Craven A hit parade on, I think, Friday night. I'd been given my first transistor radio – about the size of a house brick in a sturdy leather case. I even had earphones, as clunky as the set itself.

I remember the continental delicatessen and the delicious foreign taste of European salami. In the dim interior of Hingston's Milk Bar we ate vanilla ice cream covered in thick chocolate sauce and served in a heavy glass flute with a long-handled silver spoon. And Rygroks cakes – European sophistication, so different to jam sponges and fruit cakes. Not to mention their solid chocolate Easter eggs.



*Wallis family at Newcastle Races, c. 1963*

My mother liked a 'flutter' at the races and reinforced this by buying a part ownership in a racehorse, *French Descent*. I don't think it won much – or often – but we had some memorable days at the races in Newcastle. I have no talent or will for gambling and would lay out £2.00 in 5/- bets which disappeared in the first four races.



*Watercolour of the house at 118 Government Road, Dutchman's Beach, by Norma Proctor (nd)*

Norma was a school friend of Phemie's. Her first husband, Bob Howland was killed in WW 2 in New Guinea and Rex took on his son Tony as his legacy ward.

Rex won the block of land circa 1956/57 in a War Veterans' Lottery and we had a simple holiday cottage built on it. At that time fishing villages like Nelson Bay at Port Stephens were relatively untouched by city sophistication; soil was mostly black sand and Christmas bush grew everywhere. We spent our summer holidays at 'Dutchies'. It was a magic place for teenagers – days and days of swimming in turquoise waters, fishing, eating huge meals prepared by Phemie for the hungry horde.

On the right is a photo of the house in 2020. Perhaps, sometimes, it is better not to revisit the past.



*Clippings from Maitland Mercury*

Rex was interested in standing for Maitland Council. Undated but most likely 1960 because on the back of the clipping is written: '25 years ago, August 22 1935'). 'Wallis had no trouble to win council seat', I quote:

Mr R R Wallis scored an easy victory over other candidates in Saturday's extraordinary election (possibly 22 August 1960) for an alderman to fill a Vacancy on Maitland City Council. The vacancy was caused by the death of Alderman W J Kerrigan.

The article gives details of the voting breakdown and then a short 'bio' for Rex:

Mr Wallis...is a qualified chemist. Mr Wallis is a ratepayer in the commercial section of the city and the rural area where he resides. Mr Wallis is a descendant of a very early pioneering family of this district ... He is a family man with a wife and three children, well established in Maitland and has the interests of the Maitland district at heart.

In the last war, Mr Wallis served in the Army from 1942 to 1947 and rose from the rank of Private to Lieutenant. He is at present a member of Maitland RSL Sub-branch and Club, a member and past president of Hunter Legacy, a member of Maitland Lions Club, a Vice-President of Maitland Police-Citizens Boys' Club and a member of Maitland Chamber of Commerce.

Rex continued to prosper in public life, although his quicksilver temper meant he often fell foul of others. Phemie was active in various organisations and often modelled gowns from the Misses Phillips dress shop and the Misses McLeod's millinery at fashion parades held to raise funds for charity. Phemie and Rex attended Matrons' Balls and other major social events.



*Phemie at a Torchbearer's function. Phemie and Rex dressed for a Matrons' Ball (or the like).*

Rex continued his involvement in Legacy and Phemie was active in the equivalent women's group, the Torchbearers. This photo would seem to be a torchbearer fundraising event because of the 'torch' in front of the women.



*Wallis family and pharmacy staff at a function. The 'girls' would sometimes babysit.*



*Fiat 500 Rex was the lucky one in the family and won a Fiat 500 – 9<sup>th</sup> prize also in a War Veterans' Lottery. Phemie with Laddie at Glastonbury*

We spent several May school holidays at the Beachcomber Inn, Surfers Paradise. I remember the famous greasy muttonbird oil at the beach, the shops of sophisticated swim wear, but especially the beer garden at the Surfers Paradise Hotel next door, where the Allen Brothers and the Bee Gees were trying out their routines. (When we were younger there were trips to Jenolan Caves and Melbourne.)



*Beachcomber Hotel, Surfers Paradise, c.1960*



*On the way to Queensland (with Phemie Vera Mallaby), May school holidays, c.1960*

Once I was at Kambala, my parents would come to Sydney to take me out of school for the weekend. We often stayed at the Australia Hotel. Rex was a Gilbert & Sullivan tragic, so we were often taken to performances of the Savoy operas at the Theatre Royale.



*A dinner at the Australia Hotel, c.1960*



*Me and the Zephyr – our pride and joy. Later we even had a P76!*

Those interested in fashion will note the full cotton skirts under which were petticoats that stood up by themselves.



*5<sup>th</sup> Year at Kambala, 1962*



*School 'formal' dance (possibly 1960)*



*Debutantes' Ball, c.1963/4 and presentation to the Governor of NSW, Lt-Gen Sir Eric Woodward*

Dresses from a shop called 220 at Double Bay were all the rage (and expensive!). This one was in electric blue satin. As a boarder I didn't have much opportunity to meet young men (Kambala was strict to say the least) and, agonisingly, had to ask sons of my parents' friends as partners.

After completing the Leaving Certificate at Kambala, I headed for Pharmacy at Sydney University. I never really returned to Maitland, boarding at Women's College during my undergraduate years (1963-1965). Ann moved to Sydney in 1966 to undertake secretarial studies and left for England on an extended overseas trip in 1969.

My parents were sticklers for correct procedure and wanted me (and my sisters) to make our 'debut' – to come out (where I now ask?) – at a lavish ball, probably connected to Rex's army service and be presented to the Governor of NSW. I went along with it although couldn't really see the point. Again the agonising business of finding a partner.

In 1964 I joined my fellow Women's College students on a protest against conscription and Australia's looming involvement in the Vietnam War. We weren't particularly political – took part in the

spirit of adventure. However we were concerned that the young men of our age cohort were to be conscripted.



*Vietnam War protest, George Street Sydney*

There were also, from 1964, several holidays at Smiggin Holes in the Snowy Mountains. Here Susan, Jane & Ann line up with an instructor. In the early 1930s the sports teacher at Maitland Girls High School took a group of girls on an excursion to the Snowy Mountains. Phemie borrowed her brother's trousers and enjoyed the skiing experience to the full. So much so that she vowed to try skiing again. However it wasn't until this family holiday in 1964 that she had the chance. I loved it, little realising what far-reaching consequences it would have in my future life!



*Wallis sisters in a ski lesson at Smiggin Holes, 1964*

Jane, the 'baby' of the family followed her two older sisters to Kambala (1964-1969) and then secretarial studies in Sydney, leaving Phemie and Rex in Maitland.



*With Patsy Willis and Prue Harper, living it up at Women's College; the WC Fresher rugby team*



*With Phemie and Rex, Susan's Graduation, as B. Pharm, 1966*

Reflecting on the dispensary label on the right (found on the back of something else), it is clear that Rex at least thought I would be going into the pharmacy at 455 High Street, Maitland.



*Susan and John Steggall's wedding photo. 11 February 1967*

Like my parents and grandparents before me, we married in St Mary's.

Weddings: Susan to John Steggall in 1967; Ann to Ian Dent in 1970 and Jane to Stephen Cummings in 1974). Our splendid wedding receptions were held in marquees in the grounds of *Glastonbury*. Grandchildren began to arrive in 1971 with the birth of my son Zeke, followed by Angus Dent and our daughter Zali. We visited Phemie and Rex when we could. Regrettably, Rex had sold the house at Dutchies, which would have been a wonderful place to take young children for family holidays.

## EPILOGUE

I was busy with my own life in Sydney, assuming everything was fine in Maitland. However if I look back now I see that Rex's behaviour was increasingly erratic and he suffered a debilitating stroke one Friday afternoon in October 1976. For several years Phemie tried to manage Rex and the pharmacy – rising at 4.30 am to get them both ready for the day in High Street – but it became very difficult, especially as it was clear that Rex would never regain his health and work again. He was given every kind of rehabilitation opportunity but seemed to sink deeper into depression from which no one – not even his lively young grandchildren – could rouse him. Reluctantly Phemie sold the pharmacy and moved to a smaller, more manageable, house at 32 Melrose Street, Lorn.

Rex Wallis died on 17 August 1979 while I and my family were in France, leaving 63-year-old Phemie a widow. She picked up the threads of her life to play croquet, join a bridge club, become Treasurer of the Maitland Branch of the Liberal Party and take a strong and loving interest in her increasing band of grandchildren: Zeke, Angus, Zali, Felicity, Marney and Rebecca. She lived long enough to cuddle her great grandchildren Rex, Joey and Remy and learn of Alizé's birth in France. Sadly, she missed Addison, Philippa, Hugh, Jock, Beau and the last of the brood, Phemie Louise.

As with Rex, we her daughters didn't realise – or didn't want to acknowledge – how seriously Phemie was failing late in 2006. By April/May 2007 it was clear she could no longer live on her own – something that, in hindsight, broke her spirit. She never accepted the move to the War Vets Retirement Village at Collaroy Plateau and died in the early hours of 2 August 2007.



*The Columbarium at St Mary's – the last resting place of many members of my family.*

So ended my branch of the Wallis family's close connections to Maitland – nearly ninety years, not counting all those 19<sup>th</sup>-century forebears who had the foresight to come to the Hunter Valley to make a new life.