

## BYGONE BROOKLYN

By Tom Richmond

## JOE BAKER'S STORES

Joe Baker appears to have arrived in Brooklyn during the railway construction period. In 1886, he married Anne Absalom, the daughter of a navy, James Absalom, who was a veteran from the Crimean War.



This postcard by William Broadhurst dates from about the end of World War I. It shows Baker's three business premises. The middle one had a top storey added to it and it is one of Brooklyn's oldest buildings.

Gradually, the Bakers became the main shop-keepers in early Brooklyn. A postcard produced by William Broadhurst shows three buildings side by side on Brooklyn Road. Just up hill from the Hawkesbury River Railway Hotel ( now the Anglers' Rest).

In the postcard, Baker's General Store is on the left. It served as the newsagency as well.

In the centre was a teahouse, operated by Mrs Baker.

The large building on the right, advertising "Superior Accommodation", was the former Brooklyn Hotel, which became a boarding house.

It seems that the earliest of Baker's stores was the middle one, now partially occupied by the *Brooklyn Deli*. In 1902, a fire broke out in this shop but it was extinguished thanks to the efforts of local railway employees who saw it at an early stage. It is interesting to note that the shop had been open until 11 p.m. on the previous night.

The Bakers faced a critical period in June 1910, when Anne Baker was taken to court over the condition of one of the shops. At that time, they were operating as a butcher's shop, but Mrs Baker was charged with keeping the premises in filthy condition. An inspector removed around a hundredweight of decomposing meat. Mrs Baker was fined two pounds, with six shillings costs.

Joseph Baker was involved in another court case in 1906, when a local market gardener shot his bull. Always with a eye for improving business, Joe Baker had acquired the only bull in Brooklyn. He let it roam freely, reasoning that if a cow produced a calf, it would be sold and the owner would have money to spend in Baker's store.

Anne Baker died in 1924 and Joseph followed in 1930. Both are buried in Brooklyn cemetery.

The buildings still largely exist. The former tearoom, which is the oldest of the shops had a second storey added to it and the levels at the front have changed. The building is, however, still recognisable from the postcard and it is now ell over a hundred years old.

In the section of this old building that is now occupied by *Brooklyn Deli*, there can be seen a former window that opened into the Brooklyn Hotel. Among his other enterprises, Joe Baker ran an illegal S.P. bookmaker service, taking bets through the window.

The large former Brooklyn Hotel was destroyed by fire in about 1930.