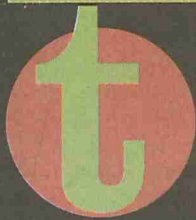


Road of change

Streets of difference on Baylis

at the archives

Wayne Doubleday



he streetscape of Baylis Street has changed dramatically since it was first laid out in the 1860s. The original

bark slab constructions were gradually replaced with wooden or brick buildings which, over time, have made way for newer premises as the owners saw fit.

Unfortunately, this process of modernisation has resulted in the demolition of some very interesting buildings and their replacement with what might, aesthetically, be described as large shoeboxes with windows.

One such building was located on the corner of Baylis and Thompson streets and included businesses located at 186, 188, 190 and 192 Baylis Street.

The original site was part of a larger parcel of land owned by the Church of England, which included the rectory, built in 1865 and St John's Hall, built in 1888.

In 1915, the Church's Property Trust built new premises on the site specifically for WR Eyles & Co, a men's mercers and general drapers store.

By 1924, Mr Eyles had passed the business over to his son, Sid, who then decided to specialise wholly and solely as a men's and boy's wear store.

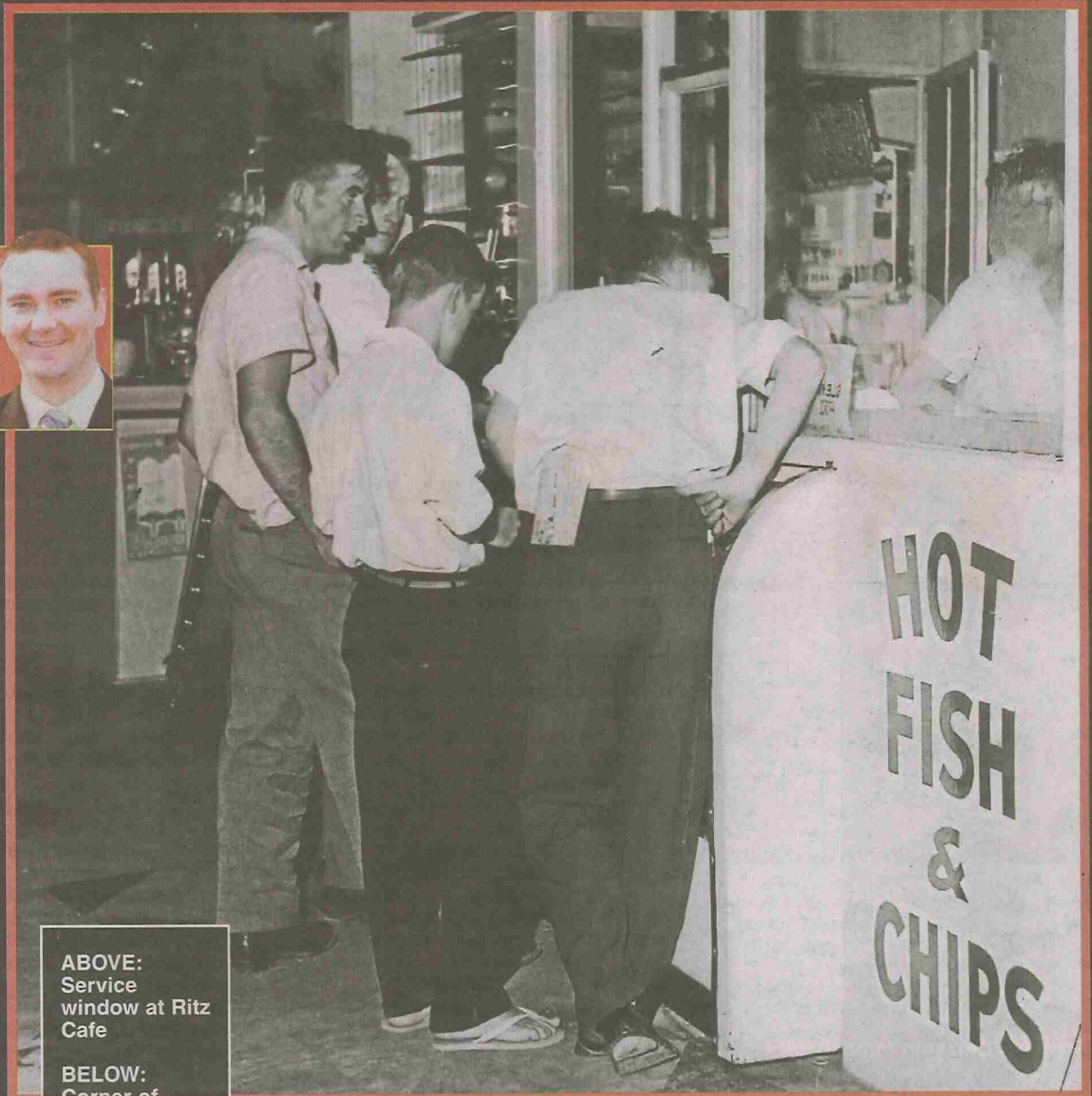
It appears as though Sid Eyles continued to trade up until the mid-1930s. However, by the end of the decade, another draper, Douglas Chain Stores, had taken over.

During the 1920s, '30s and '40s the adjoining shops, being 188, 190 and 192 Baylis Street were occupied by a variety of businesses including the Singer Sewing Machine Co, WJ Yates (stationers), Cropleys Pty Ltd (bootmakers), Bert and William Wright (fruiterers) and JJ Speirs (jewellers).

The Ritz Milk Bar and Dining Room, which was established on the corner site during the early 1940s, was purchased by Mrs Maude Chambers in December 1943.

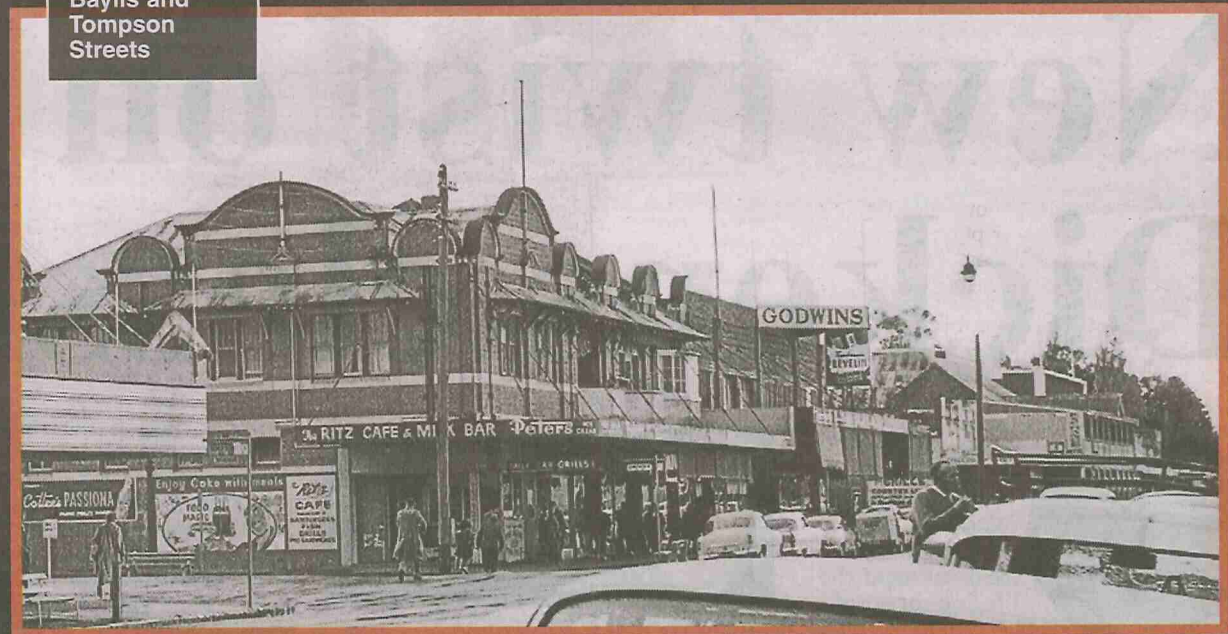
Mrs Chambers who had previously conducted the Blue Moon Cafe was also the first woman alderman of the Municipality of Wagga Wagga.

Other wellknown owners of the Ritz Cafe were Nick and Patricia Georgiou who purchased the business in 1957. The cafe was famous for its hamburgers and steak sandwiches, and would stay open until 1am to cater for the hungry crowds departing the "pictures" which finished around 11.30pm. The Georgious, aided by



ABOVE: Service window at Ritz Cafe

BELOW: Corner of Baylis and Tompson Streets



their sons – Michael, Anthony and George – continued to operate the cafe until 1969.

In 1970, the Wagga Chamber of Commerce, which adjoined the Ritz Cafe, decided to build new premises to house the Commerce Permanent Building Society and Airlines of NSW.

A feature of the new building, which cost \$185,000 to construct, were the automatically opening doors – the first of their kind in Wagga. The building society was originally formed as an off-shoot of

the chamber of commerce in 1956, with the aim of assisting local people who were having difficulty gaining housing finance.

It took some time for the society to become established and it was about two years before the first loan was made. Approval for this loan went through a board of directors meeting on April 8, 1958, along with six other loan applications. The inaugural loan was for £2000 and was payable over 25 years at 6 per cent.

The Commerce Permanent

Building Society was taken over by the NSW Permanent Building Society which was demutualised in 1985 to become the Advance Bank, eventually merging with St George Bank in 1997.

While the new building has served these various financial institutions well for more than 40 years, I can't help but feel the main street might be just that bit more interesting had the original building (and many others) been maintained instead of demolished.

■ Compiled by Paul O'Donnell
■ References: Morris, Sherry

(1999) *Wagga Wagga – A History*; *The Daily Advertiser*, 01/12/1943, 15/05/1970.

24/11/1999; Wagga Wagga City Council Rate and Valuation Registers, [CSURA RW1429].

The CSU Regional Archives is extending its opening hours include the first Saturday of every month. On these days, the archives will be open from 10am to 3pm. The next Saturday opening will occur on December 1. This trial initiative has been put in place to cater for those researchers who are unable to visit the archives on weekdays during normal business hours. It is hoped that enough researchers and visitors will avail themselves of this service to warrant it becoming a permanent occurrence.

what you need to know

■ The CSU Regional Archives are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Located in the Blakemore Building on South Campus of the university, access can be gained via College Avenue or Hely Avenue. Members of the public are welcome to visit the search room, where professional archival staff can assist with inquiries. For those people unable to visit the archives in person, staff can provide a research service for straight-forward inquiries for a fee of \$55 per hour including copying and postage. For further information, phone 02 6925 3666, email archive@csu.edu.au, or visit our website at www.csu.edu.au/research/archives for a full listing of holdings and more detailed information.