

Lathlain Park Service Station (a photographic memory)

Photograph taken: 1952

Person unknown (in doorway), Frederick Booker (near car boot)

Lathlain Park Service Station, on the corner of Roberts Road and Rutland Avenue was built and operated in the early 1950s by my grandparents, Frederick and Hazel Booker. Fred served as a RAAF mechanic in WWII, notably repairing Catalina Flying Boats in Darwin, and returned from the conflict to settle in Lathlain. He started his mechanical business from his home in a shed and then established Lathlain Park Service Station when a parcel of land became available near the rail line on Roberts Road. Fred is pictured here looking in the boot of a Vauxhall with an Austin ready to fill up and FJ Holden in the lubritorium.

Lathlain Park Service Station offered customers full driveway service of petrol, checking oil, water, tyres and washing windscreens, mechanical repairs and car servicing and a friendly chat. It became a landmark for the local community with weekly customers and their driveway conversations, the last stop for country travellers and hosted memorable Guy Fawkes Nights and Christmas parties. As a young boy my Dad and his brother would open the station before going to school and on the weekends. Dad then served his mechanical apprenticeship under his father at the Service Station.

Fred leased the Service Station to BP (formerly COR) when he retired in 1969. In 1973 my parents, Peter and Amy Booker became co proprietors leasing the Service Station from Main Roads after they purchased the land from Fred. During these years I remember mum would deliver freshly baked morning tea, lunch and cater for late night rosters. Those were the days of either weekly or weekend rosters and the hours were very long. Dad would work until late and was assisted by the Carlisle Football and Cricket Club for a percentage of profits towards their fundraising. Some well-known names regularly filled up at the service station, including Barry Cable, Ernie Dingo, the Lillee family, Don Hancock and Eric Edgar Cook.

Almost every day I would come home from school and race down to the station with my younger brother on our bikes. We had to follow strict rules – watch the driveways for cars, whistle at the front office to ward off any colourful language from the blokes out the back, and stay away from the pit and lube room, or ‘lubritorium’. It became a regular meeting place for customers, especially Friday afternoons, and always a generous crowd when my brother and I were asking for spell-a-thon sponsorship for school fundraising. Giant Readymix trucks with whirling agitators, bright blue Kimber tow trucks with jangling hooks and chains and cars of all makes and models were either hoisted up for repair or hooked to a petrol bowser as part of a full driveway service. Dad always tinkered with marvellous machines and I was sometimes taken for a test drive around the yard; be it a forklift, a mini-bike and the most memorable, a hovercraft.

Technological changes to cars, credit cards with a thermal paper swipe machine and the notion of self-serve petrol and the impending demolition of the Service Station to facilitate the new Millers Crossing were deciding factors for my father to venture into a new career. Twenty years have passed and the foundations of Lathlain Park Service Station have gone but childhood memories return each time I drive over Millers Crossing Bridge that now takes its place in the suburban landscape.