



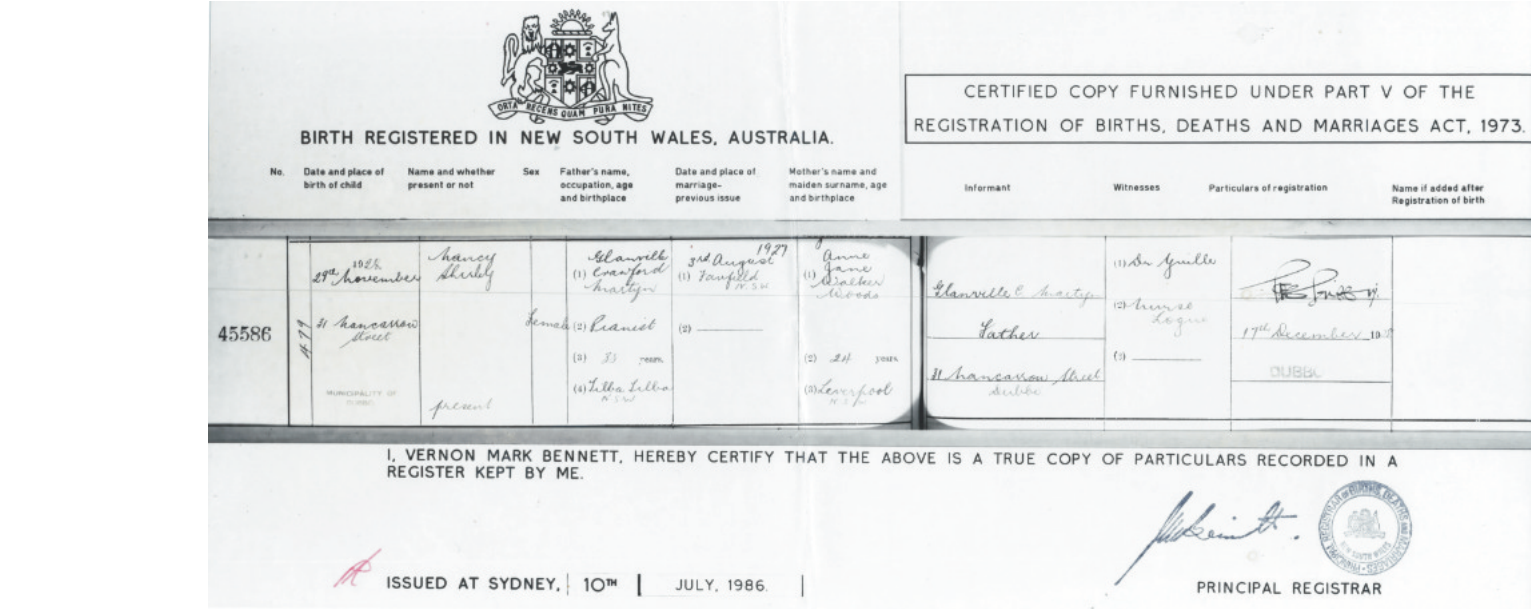
**(Nancy) Shirley (née Martyn) Stevens**

**1928–2018**



Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens



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Foreword

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| In 2019, I published my father's memoirs and his father's memoirs; we are very fortunate that both typed up their life stories. So I assumed that my mother would have prepared hers too. In fact, a hand-scrawled list of computer files that Dad compiled over several years identifies file number 676.doc as "NSS History", but the file is nowhere to be found. So I have written down what I know, relying on old photographs, occasional notes that Mum wrote and Uncle Bob, Mum's surviving brother. Readers are invited to submit corrections and additions. |    |
| Matthew Stevens<br>Thornleigh, NSW, 2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |    |
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Top left: Anne and Glan with Shirley, Dubbo, December 1928.  
Left: Portrait of Shirley, 1929.  
Above: Shirley at about 6 months in Anne's arms, Glan behind and Glan's sister Auntie Dorrie.



### Early life

Shirley's maternal grandparents, John James Woods and Elizabeth Jane Maxwell, were born in what is now Northern Ireland, in neighbouring villages, and migrated separately to Australia in the 1890s, where they met at her sister Maggie's pub near Central Station in Sydney. They had nine children—six girls followed by three boys. Shirley's mother was their second daughter, Anne Jane Walker Woods, born 4 January 1904.

Shirley's paternal grandfather, John Martyn, was born in Cornwall to Welsh parents, where he became a miner. He migrated to Pennsylvania, USA, to work as a mining engineer. Shirley's maternal grandmother, Dorothy Crawford, was born in Stockton, Pennsylvania, to English immigrants of Scottish ancestry. John and Dorothy met and married at church in Pennsylvania (John was a musician and became involved in the Presbyterian church choir) and had three children there before John moved the family to Australia. They moved around NSW and Victoria as John took a series of jobs managing mines and they added four more children. Settling in Tilba Tilba, on the NSW South Coast, close to another mine, they had their eighth and last child, Glanville Crawford Martyn, born 21 November 1893. They later moved to Sydney's eastern suburbs.

Glan was a highly talented pianist, largely self-taught, and was church organist at the McNeill Memorial Presbyterian Church in Waverley, although he worked as a clerk at the Coastal Farmers' Co-operative Society. In 1917 he enlisted in the Australian Army and, following training in Sydney, sailed to the UK to serve as a gunner in France and Belgium in the last year of World War I. Following the Armistice, there weren't enough ships to bring the troops home quickly, and his battalion stayed

for most of 1919. Being a musician, he joined The Courtiers' concert party, which kept the waiting troops in France and then England entertained. Returning home, he followed his career as a musician, finding work in the silent movies as an accompanist.

Anne worked as a seamstress, but also helped out at her parents' open-air cinema on The Crescent, Fairfield, which had roles for most of the siblings. This might be how she met Glan.

Anne and Glan married on 3 August 1927 but moved to Dubbo, in central NSW, where Glan had a job as an accompanist at the Monarch Empire Theatre. Shirley later told her grandson Robert: "They had a theatre and they also had an open air cinema where people sat in deck chairs in the summertime to watch the movie in the open air."

Shirley was born on 29 November 1928 at 31 Nancarrow Street, Dubbo, a simple worker's cottage. Her mother wanted her to be named Nancy. Her father wanted to call her Shirley. Both won. As a baby, Shirley used to sleep beneath the piano while Glan played.

With the arrival of the talkies, Glan found himself out of a job, and took up work as a local bus driver for a while, but the arrival of the Great Depression forced the family to move back to Sydney. They moved to Fairfield, where Anne's parents and siblings lived, and Anne's parents set them up in a little grocery shop at 24 Frederick Street. "So we came back to Sydney where my mother's mother—my Nana, your great-great grandmother—had bought a little shop and put my parents in there to work."

"Now, my dad was out every night playing the piano and my mother used to have to cook on the wood stove at





Shirley Stevens



Shirley (seated) with cousin Betty Osborne, Lackey Street, Fairfield, 1931.



Shirley on Betty's trike, Lackey Street, Fairfield, 1931.

night and give us our dinner and bath us, put us to bed, and then she'd go into the shop, where she used to weigh up bags of sugar. Butter came in boxes and she used to have to cut the butter, wrap it up in paper and then put it in the icebox. There were no refrigerators then either. And she worked very hard and she looked after us very well; she made all our clothes for us. And at that time, during the Depression, there was very little money about. So she used to unpick the bags that the flour came in. And she used to boil them up in the copper and stitch them together and make sheets for our beds, and she made our underwear out of the same bags. She was really very special."

Despite having food in the shop, they lived a hand-to-mouth existence, as they could barely afford the food that they stocked. Her friends couldn't understand why the family couldn't just eat their stock, and felt that they were somehow privileged. Shirley's brother Bob wrote: "These were tough times for our little family as most of Mum's and Dad's customers were very hungry but couldn't pay their bills, and there was often a last-minute dash by Dad to the bank to make a deposit to cover a cheque before it bounced." At least Glan had his musical skills and picked up extra income by playing for local dances with his orchestra, which became a popular part of the social scene in south-western Sydney during the 1930s.

Shirley's brother John Glanville Martyn was born in 1931. Shirley started school in 1934, at the age of 5. "I went to school at Fairfield Public School right through from kindergarten to [year] six. I was always known as the best reader in the school, and whenever there was any special function on Anzac Day or the Queen's [King's?] birthday, I would be the one standing up on the stage at the picture show reading something special that

Shirley Stevens



Above: John and Shirley with Big Teddy, 1932. Below: Big Teddy at 90.







Above: Dossie Slender, Shirley, Betty Osborne and Ronnie Slender, 1932.  
Top right: Shirley and John with Anne and another at Mona Vale, 1932.  
Right and below: John and Shirley, 1933.



the headmaster had chosen.” Being taller than the other girls (an irony given that she reached only 5 feet 6 inches tall, or 167 cm), she was often called on to lead marches in the playground.

Until her first haircut at the age of 6, she had long blonde curls down to her waist. Being of a similar age to the child star Shirley Temple, with similar hair and the same name, she drew a lot of comparisons. She liked to sing and dance, too, which one day led to disaster as, dancing down the hallway in their house, she fell through the rotten floorboards! “I could sing and I just enjoyed myself. I wasn’t a noisy child. I used to love to read a lot and I still like to read a lot, but then when you’re small like that you don’t realise what life is like when it’s hard work for your parents.”

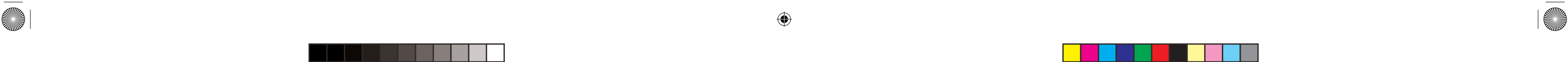
Shirley was left-handed (along with George and both of their children). But while most left-handed children were forced, often by physical punishment, to write with their right hand (as George was), Shirley escaped the irrational “correction”: at the start of each school year, her mother would meet the teacher and instruct him or her not to coerce Shirley. In later life, Shirley would look for opportunities to identify with other left-handers she randomly encountered.

Having five aunts and three uncles on her mother’s side and four aunts and two uncles on her father’s side, Shirley was blessed with dozens of cousins: 35 on the Woods side and several more on the Martyn side. “I had lots of cousins and I played every afternoon after school with all my cousins. My mother had five sisters and three brothers and we all lived close to each other. In those days people didn’t move about the country a great deal; they just stayed with their families in the area where they were born.”

Shirley’s brother Robert (Bob) Crawford Martyn was



Glan, Shirley, John and Anne at an exhibition at the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge pylon, 1935.







Above: Class photo, Fairfield Public School, 1936. Shirley is in middle row, second from left.  
Left: Detail of class photo, Fairfield Public School, 1935.

born in 1937. Being 8½ years older than Bob and with both parents flat out trying to earn an income, Shirley became a second mother to Bob, who later wrote: “As I became a little older I began to realise I had two Mums because you were there to care for me when Mum was busy in the shop, being 8 years older and with a noticeable maternal instinct. I would have been doing OK except for our brother who made it clear that his preference was for me to move to another planet.”

“World War 2 had started and things got pretty grim. Dad dug a trench in the shed [behind the Fairfield shop] that was in the backyard [in case] we were bombed. He chose to dig the trench inside to stop it filling with water when it rained. Being a veteran of WWI he doubtless had plenty of practice.”

After 10 years of running the shop, around 1940 Glan and Anne sold it and moved to Ashfield. Bob wrote: "Dad's Fiat car broke a tooth off the crown wheel, and as we were then at war with Italy, parts were unavailable, so I am guessing that this event triggered the decision to move to Ashfield. This meant a new car and a new job for Dad." Glan joined the Producers' Distributing Society (a rural produce co-op), where he worked for 8 years.

In 1941, Shirley started at Liverpool Girls' High School in what is now called year 7. At school, all the girls learned to touch-type, and their mothers were required to make and supply a bib for each girl to tie behind her neck and over the typewriter so that the girls couldn't look at their hands as they typed. In year 9, Shirley qualified in Pittman's shorthand. In the same year she was confirmed in her church fellowship, where she had many friends. One friend, perhaps from later work, invited her home one day for dinner. Her mother served spaghetti bolognese, the first such that Shirley had ever eaten. It



Shirley, John and Bobbie, 1937 (above) and 1938 (below).







Above: Class photo, Liverpool Girls' High School, 1941. Shirley is in the second-back row, third from left in that row. Below left: At Circular Quay, from left: Eunice, Kathleen, Betty (friend), Gladys, Norma, Shirley, 5 November 1944. Below right: In Hyde Park, from left: Shirley, Betty (cousin), Lorna, Miss Cuthbert, Margaret, Pat, Berenice, Shirley, Joan, September 1940.



made a change from her mother's rigid meat-and-three-veg meals of chops, mashed potato, un stomachable boiled pumpkin or choko, and a slurry of green vegetables.

Shirley left school in what is now year 9, as most kids did then, and with her stenographic skills earned a series of jobs with firms in the city. She said that in those days, one could walk out of a job and straight into another. She worked from 1947 to 1954 for the Mercantile Mutual Insurance Company in Pitt Street as a "shorthand-typiste". Decades later she still took notes in shorthand and could still belt out correspondence on a typewriter.

During her late teens she joined the Fairfield Players, an amateur dramatic group that put on light plays, including "Bus Stop" and "Annie Get Your Gun", in which she played—and sang—Annie. There she met Jacqueline Oram-Burd, whom she invited home one day for lunch. She recalled her brother John laying eyes on Jacqueline and "his tongue hanging out". John and Jacqueline later married.

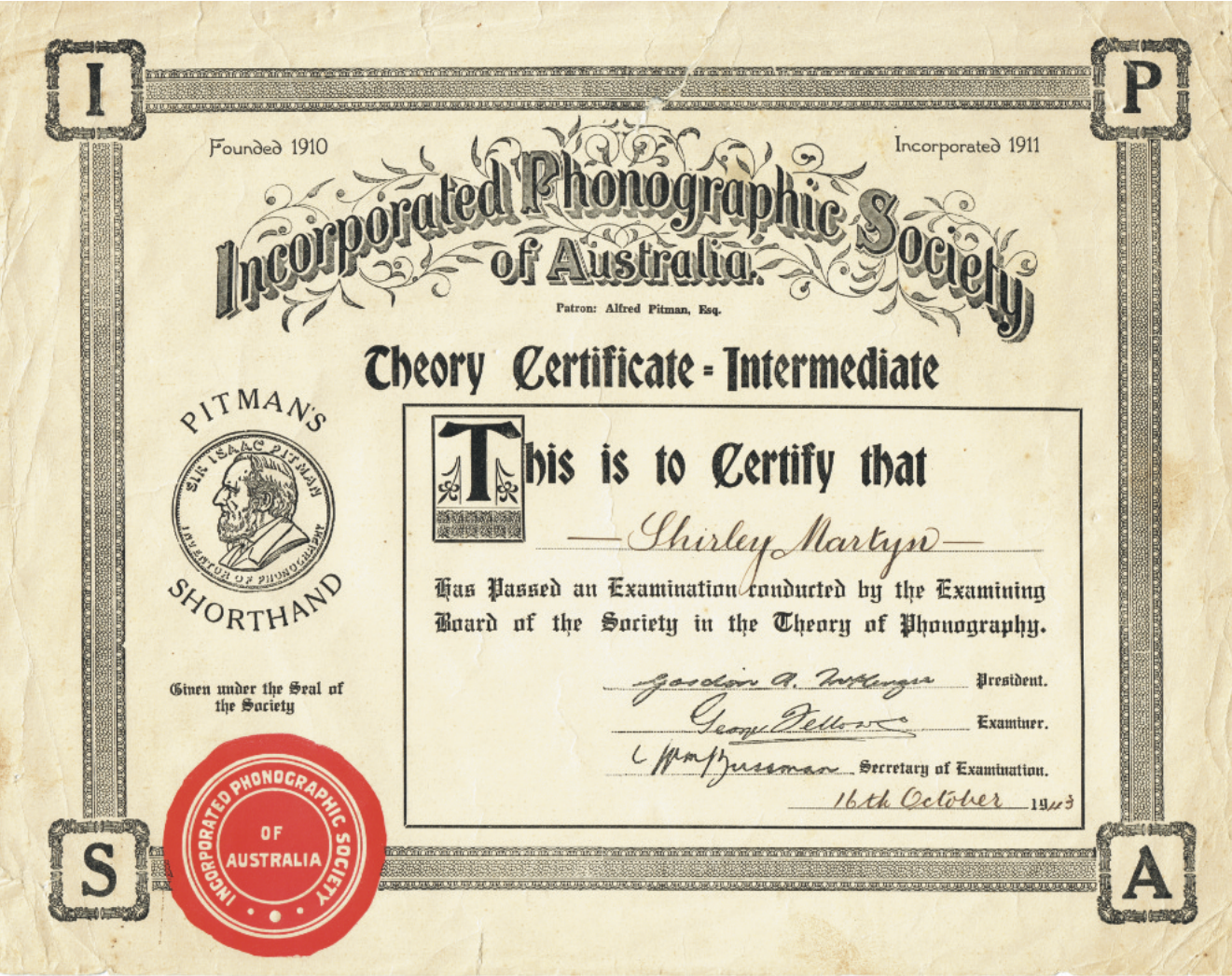
At around the same time, the family moved to 83 Berwick Street, Guildford, a few kilometres away. Glan later worked for 10 years at Winns Department Store in Auburn. During another period, he worked as a piano demonstrator and salesman at Palings Music Store on George Street, Wynyard.

Shirley was the second grandchild to Nana and Pop Woods. Her cousin Betty (Eva Elizabeth Osborne) was born 2 years earlier, and the two of them remained best friends throughout their lives. The other Woods cousins were younger than Shirley, but the Martyn cousins were all much older on account of the gap of almost 20 years between Glan and his oldest sister. Both of Glan's parents had died many years before Shirley was born, so



Shirley, Bobbie and Anne in a street photo, 1939.





she never knew them, but her elderly aunts and uncles and the older cousins were regular features in her life. Glan's sister Auntie Blanche, who lived in Newport, survived until 1961. Glan's great-niece Minnie Collett, granddaughter of his sister Minnie Maud, was one cousin Shirley remained in contact with into the 2000s. Minnie bore a striking resemblance to Shirley.

Nana and Pop Woods lived for many years over the road from the Bowtell family, and the Woods children grew up alongside the Bowtell children. (Nana and Pop lived on the corner of York and Frederick Streets; the Bowtells lived opposite in Frederick Street. Pa Bowtell had a wood yard.) The Woods children were all kept clean and tidy. The Bowtell children were allowed to roam free. When someone once wondered why the Woods children often got sick and the Bowtell children didn't, Nana Woods suggested that the germs couldn't get through all the dirt. When Shirley was a child, Nanna (Emily) Bowtell became a second grandmother to her. Nanna Bowtell's daughter, Auntie Vera Jones, took a role in raising John, who would have preferred to be an only child. Nanna Bowtell lived to the age of 103 (circa 1974), and looked after herself, despite failing eyesight, to the end.

As a child, Shirley would go with her family for long drives out into the countryside of what is now West Penant Hills and Castle Hill to visit the farm and orchard of Auntie Edie Gee, one of Nana Woods's nieces. Her father's original car—a Ford Model T—was built before pumping technology was invented, so the petrol flowed from the tank to the engine solely under gravity. If he ever had to drive up a steep hill, he had to drive up in reverse or the engine would stop for want of petrol. "My dad always had a car. He needed that because of going out at night to play the piano for dances and balls and



Nanna (Emily) Bowtell's 90th birthday party, circa 1958. Back left: Uncle Sid. Three Woods sisters present—Isabella Margaret (with glasses), Anne Jane Walker, Eva May —and Eva's younger daughter, Rosemary Maitland Jackson. (Woman in centre is not identified; perhaps Auntie Vera)





Top left: Shirley at Narrabeen camp ground, December 1944.  
Left: Shirley and Anne in street photo, Martin Place, 1949.  
Above: Friend Betty and Shirley in King George V Garden, Hyde Park, 25 February 1945.

people's weddings, and he also played the organ at church. He was really very talented. And on some days he'd take us all somewhere for the day: to the beach, or we'd go for a drive around Castle Hill. In those days there were very few houses out there—it was all lots of paddocks and cows and orchards out that way—and the beaches were always fairly empty and we'd take sandwiches with us, and we could buy some boiling water somewhere; there'd always be a little shop by the beach. We'd go and buy boiling water for our tea and we'd have soft drinks with some fruit. It was a really happy time. Quite different from the way people live these days."

One annual trek involved packing the car, an Austin by this time, with camping gear and driving the arduous journey into the foreign wilds of Narrabeen, on Sydney's Northern Beaches, where the family would camp every summer. The tradition started in 1942 and lasted 15 years. Glan would rig up a kerosene tin of water over the fire so the family could have a hot shower every day. He would commute to work each day from the camp-ground. Later, Shirley would catch the bus to Manly and the ferry into the city to work, and then come back to the camp for a swim in Narrabeen Lagoon.

One day Glan had a car accident as he was driving home in Guildford from work. Shirley wrote:

"Coming home from the train, the temperature was cool, getting dark, and as I turned the corner I saw my Dad's car parked askew in the gutter instead of it being in the garage. A tragedy had occurred; the car should have been in the garage.

"I went into the house to see Mum crying and Dad in shock—a lad aged 16 ran into the car on his motorbike. As Dad was turning the corner, the bike went under the



Above: Glan, Shirley and Anne at Shirley's 21st birthday party, November 1949.  
Below: Shirley and Bob at Narrabeen camp ground, 1950.







Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens

No. 21.

NEW SOUTH WALES

No. **C 935226**

IN MINISTER'S REGISTER.

REGISTRAR'S No. **3389**

MARRIAGE ACT, 1899-1948.  
(FOURTH SCHEDULE.)

CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE

I, **ARNOLD CEDRIC PIKE** being  
*Assistant District Registrar of Marriages,*

do hereby Certify that I have this day at *the Registrar General's Office, Sydney* duly celebrated Marriage between  
*George Woodfull Stevens*  
*R.A.N. 83 Bangor Street, Guildford, Bunde*  
and  
*Nancy Shirley Martyn*  
*83 Benwick St, Guildford, Sydney*

after declaration duly made before me as by law required.

DATED this *16th* day of *October*, 19*53*

*Arnold C. Pike*

*Shirley Martyn*

*George Woodfull Stevens*

File Sections 5, 23, and 24, Marriage Act, 1899-1948.

Signatures of Witnesses:  
*A. G. Wilson*  
*R. A. Stevens*

Residence: *83 Benwick St, Guildford*  
Residence: *83 Bangor Street, Guildford*

"The declaration on the back hereof must be duly made and signed, otherwise the parties and the officiating Minister or Registrar are liable to the punishment by law provided in that behalf."

Anne, George, Shirley and Glan following Shirley and George's secret civil marriage ceremony in Sydney on 16 October 1953.

DECLARATION BEFORE DISTRICT REGISTRAR OR MINISTER.

I, *George Woodfull Stevens*, *R.A.N. 83 Bangor Street, Guildford, Bunde* being duly sworn, do on my oath declare—[or]—do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm—that I have attained the age of twenty-one years—[or]—that I have duly obtained the written consent required by the Marriage Act, 1899-1948,—and I believe there is no impediment or lawful objection by reason of any kindred relationship, or alliance, or any former marriage, or the age of parent or grandparent, or any other lawful cause, to my being married to *Nancy Shirley Martyn*, *83 Benwick St, Guildford, Sydney*

and I hereby further declare that I have full knowledge that if I swear or affirm falsely I shall be guilty of perjury, and be liable to be punished accordingly.

And I, the said *Nancy Shirley Martyn*, being duly sworn, do on my oath declare—[or]—do solemnly and sincerely declare and affirm—that I have attained the age of twenty-one years—[or]—that I have duly obtained the written consent required by the Marriage Act, 1899-1948,—and I believe there is no impediment or lawful objection, by reason of any kindred relationship, or alliance, or any former marriage, or the age of parent or grandparent, or any other lawful cause, to my being married to the said *George Woodfull Stevens*

and I hereby further declare that I have full knowledge that if I swear or affirm falsely I shall be guilty of perjury, and be liable to be punished accordingly.

DECLARED and sworn—[or]—and affirmed—by both parties named this *16th* day of *October*, 19*53* Before me,  
*Arnold C. Pike*  
Signature and Designation of Minister or Registrar

R.B.—Affirm Written Consent to Certificate for Registrar.

The Consents of \*  
were given in writing to the marriage of the Bridegroom.

The Consents of \*  
were given in writing to the marriage of the Bride.

car, and the lad was thrown onto the footpath. The police came; so did the neighbours. The boy died. Dad had to go to court, but he was not charged."

A neighbour in the next street—83 Bangor Street—heard about the accident and sent his son, visiting on leave from the Navy, around to ask after Glan. The young naval officer was George Stevens. Only a year later, he and Shirley were married!

## Marriage

As George was in the Navy and thus away a lot of the time, he and Shirley decided to get married in secret so that she qualified for a wife's allowance while he was away for several months, giving them both time to plan for a church wedding and to work out where to live. So on 16 October 1953, they were married in the Registrar General's office in Sydney with only her parents and his father and stepmother present. George didn't tell his mother, who could be difficult, and Shirley didn't tell her brothers or anyone else. While George was away at sea, Shirley continued to live with her parents as Miss Martyn and continued to go to work, never letting on that she was now married.

They then took several months to decide, via frequent postal exchange from Sydney to the HMAS Sydney, when and where they would marry, and where they would live. They eventually settled on 26 June 1954 at St Mark's Church of England, Granville. It was a lavish affair, with many guests, including Shirley's parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. Afterwards, they flew to Lord Howe Island. This involved catching the flying boat from Rushcutters Bay, on Sydney Harbour, at half past

Glan, George, Shirley and Anne following Shirley and George's church wedding, Masonic Hall, Granville, NSW, 26 June 1954.

18

19



Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens

Samarai  
Main Road  
Porth Lomadoe  
Nov. 26<sup>th</sup> 1953

Dear Shirley.

It's no use being really  
formal, is it? So I am calling you  
Shirley to shake with. Indeed  
we are getting used to hearing  
your name when our letters come  
from Guildford.

However I am just sending  
these few lines to Congratulate  
you upon your engagement  
to "our" George. It is a dear boy  
and I most sincerely hope that the  
future holds great happiness  
for you both. I guess the parting  
was pretty awful for both of you,  
but time passes so very quickly  
that <sup>the</sup> "Sydney" will soon be coming

2

home again. I must send  
a few lines to George, but I  
had to wait for his address.  
His Dad sent it yesterday.  
How strange that your homes have  
the same No. 83. It's nice that you  
are able to pop in & see our folk  
at 83. Bangor St. I was so pleased  
to hear that your Father liked  
the tone of the little Organ. I am so  
glad they have it, but we miss  
it all the same. I guess Ian has  
fun trying to play. We often talk  
of him & long to see him - Also  
his Mother I do hope she is getting  
quite strong again.

We heard of the beautiful flowers  
you were presented with. No doubt  
you wished George could have seen  
them.

3

We have had such a lot of  
rain today. The weather changes  
so suddenly. Auntie has gone  
to a Birthday afternoon, she  
was fortunate a friend called  
for her & saved her getting wet.  
She will be sending you a message  
soon also.

Will you please give our  
Kind Regards to your Father  
& Mother - also the Season's  
Greetings.

So again wishing  
you much happiness dear,  
of course George is included  
in this - With a happy welcome  
into our Family. I remain.

Yours with love.  
George's Grand-ma

Mrs S. Martyn.  
73. Berwick Street,  
Guildford.  
G. S. W.

Letter welcoming Shirley to the family from Pem (Emma née Daws) Stevens, George's paternal grandmother, 26 November 1953.





Above: Shirley on her honeymoon on Lord Howe Island, June 1954.  
Top right: Shirley and John with John's fiancée, Jacqueline Oram-Burd, Wentworth Falls, 1953.  
Bottom right: Shirley knocking in the survey post for the house in Huskisson, 1957.  
Below: Bob, Shirley, John, Jacqueline, Anne and Glan at John and Jacqueline's wedding, 23 October 1954.



midnight to coincide with the tide (high tide 03:48). At Lord Howe Island, they were met by the only vehicle on the island, a Holden ute, and so began their honeymoon.

During their long-distance correspondence, George revealed that his mother had decided to sell her house in Melbourne and split the proceeds with George and his older brother, Dick, who had both contributed to its renovation. That would then give George and Shirley enough money for a house deposit. But it took a while for a house to eventuate, as first they lived on base at Jervis Bay in Married Quarters, and then later moved off base to rent in a series of grubby two-room shacks while they saved for the rest of the deposit. Finally, in 1957, they scraped together enough money to buy land at 22 Owen Street, Huskisson, not far from the naval base, and George then took leave from the Navy to build the house himself. He bought books on building, with step-by-step diagrams showing how to saw and drill and lay bricks, and bought several hand tools that are still in use 60 years later. Shirley worked as his labourer. She called him Corky (a pet form of George) and he called her Tom, as befits a builder's labourer.

He cut all of the timber by hand and hammered in all of the nails by hand. The house was clad in fibro-asbestos sheets, and why he didn't contract mesothelioma will remain a mystery. Being a qualified electrician, he later (not initially) wired up the house. Being a self-taught man, he did all of the plumbing, joinery, roofing and glazing himself too. For heating, they installed a slow-combustion stove, which kept the house warm in winter and provided hot water for the bath and shower. It also cooked all of the meals.

Out the back they kept chickens for their eggs. In those days, chicken feed was supplied in cotton fabric bags, typ-



Above: 22 Owen Street, Huskisson. Below: George (left), Shirley (right, with Matthew) and naval wife Jenny Moloney (with twins), for whom Jennifer Rosalie was named, Huskisson, 1960.







In 1954 in Hong Kong, George took a black-and-white photograph of Shirley to a man who painted portraits. The man was deaf, so perhaps he had an interpreter. The man painted a portrait of Shirley on silk (left). He asked George what colour Shirley’s eyes were. “Um, brown?” Shirley had blue eyes. Back home, George’s father, Fred, decided to fix it, and pulled out his watercolour paints. The blue paint immediately ran into the silk and spoiled the painting. It took several decades to fade.



Carl the German Shepherd beside the Holden ute at 14 Shackel Avenue, Guildford.



How this gathering in 1954 came to take place, and where, is not recorded. Rear: Glan. From left: Jean Stevens (married George’s brother Dick) with son Christopher William Stevens, Cecily (née Pescott) Stevens (George’s mother) and Shirley.







Above: George and Shirley in the Dandenongs, Victoria, 1955.  
Above right: Shirley with Matthew and Carl the German shepherd, 1960.  
Below right: Shirley with Matthew, 1960.



tried to go swimming at the beach in Huskisson, when Carl would dutifully dog-paddle out in the waves, gently take Shirley's wrist in his mouth, and tow her back to shore. Carl proved to be too loyal to the family when he attacked the postman one day, and in 1962 was put to sleep.

In July 1957, one of Anne and Glan's neighbours, Mrs Leslie Tobin, hired a recording engineer (David Cummings of Wonder Records, a one-man operation) based in Pymble, on Sydney's Upper North Shore, to bring his recording equipment to Guildford to record Glan at the piano. Despite having played as a church organist, in the silent movies, at dances and for friends and family, Glan had never made a recording. The resulting cutting, with only six or seven copies, was the only recording he ever made. Many years later it was converted to CD and lodged with the National Film and Sound Archive. The timing was fortuitous: Glan had a stroke in late December 1957 and was admitted to Fairfield Hospital, where he had a second stroke and died on 27 December. This was the third death in the family in quick succession, as Pop and Nana Woods also died during 1957.

By late 1955, with no pregnancy in sight, George underwent testing, which showed a 5% motility count, so he was prescribed a course of a drug called Antuitrin "S" (anterior pituitary-like sex hormone). In the meantime, they began an application to adopt. Just as the adoption application approached fruition, Shirley became pregnant in 1959.

George was away at sea in April 1960 when Matthew Lindsay was born, and it was 6 weeks before he got to meet his first born. So when Shirley went into labour, Mr Van drove her to the Shoalhaven Base Hospital in

Nowra. He then brought her back home again. George had wanted to call his son Simon. Shirley got in first.

Life in their little house was at first tough, as it was a few years before George installed electricity. Despite repeated applications for promotion in the Navy, George ran into the seniority wall, which ensured that officers were promoted on the basis of time served, not merit, and the income was not much. His smoking habit didn't help. From the age of 16, when he joined the merchant navy, George had smoked heavily. He was still smoking when Matthew was born. One day, Shirley was unpicking chicken feed bags to make clothes for Matthew on account of having no money, and George announced that he was off to the shops to buy cigarettes. Shirley threw a fit: "I'm unpicking chook food bags to make clothes for the baby and you're wasting money on cigarettes!" There and then he quit, and he never touched them again.

The frugality of making clothes, and the pride in doing so, continued throughout Shirley's life, as she continued to knit jumpers and make shirts, pyjamas, dresses and trousers for all of the family until she was about 80.





Shirley Stevens



Shirley with Matthew and Jenny, 14 Shackell Avenue, Guildford, 1962.



Shirley with Matthew and Jenny, 83 Berwick Street, Guildford, 1963.



### A civilian wife

Having missed the birth of his first child and unwilling to wait another 10 years for promotion, George resigned from the Navy in 1961 and the family moved to Sydney, initially to rented accommodation in a two-room flat behind a dentist's rooms at 26 Smart Street, Fairfield. This suited Shirley, as her now-widowed mother was close by. It was far preferable to her regular drives from Huskisson to Sydney and back with the baby in a bassinet unsecured on the front seat of the family's ute. Shirley and George's second child, Jennifer Rosalie, was born on 13 September 1962. By this time George had tried two unsuccessful jobs, first as a radio technician at TCN Channel 9 in Willoughby and then selling shirts in David Jones on George Street, before successfully talking his way into IBM as a customer engineer. This gave George enough income that they were able to sell the house in Huskisson and buy a fibro shack at 14 Shackell Avenue, Guildford, close to Shirley's mother and youngest brother.

George worked hard, and rapid promotion in IBM saw him offered a two-year transfer to Melbourne. So in 1964, with IBM's help in moving and financing the sale of the house in Guildford and the purchase of a house in Melbourne, the family drove from Sydney via overnight stops in Gundagai and Wangaratta to Melbourne. At first they stayed with George's father, Fred, and stepmother, Nance, at 2 Kyarra Road, Glen Iris, while they scouted around for a house. They settled on a newly built spec home at 40 Grenfell Road, Mount Waverley (for the total sum of £6000). At first, Shirley knew no one in Melbourne, but quickly made local friends, particularly with the next-door neighbour, Edyth Kirk, and her husband, Brian. The Kirks had a little boy, Gregory, who was just 3 days older than Jenny, and two younger daughters, and

Shirley Stevens



Above: George with Jenny and Matthew at 40 Grenfell Road, Mount Waverley, 1965.  
Below: Shirley with Jenny and Matthew at 40 Grenfell Road, 1964.







Matthew and Jenny at the flat in Grasmere Road, Cremorne, 1966.



Shirley (centre) and Jenny (below) at the reception for Bob's wedding to Karen Morgan (far right), Pymble, NSW, 1965. Photo includes Auntie Eva (obscured) and Hilary Tobin (right).



Shirley (centre), George (far back right), Matthew and Jenny, along with Uncle Keith Goodacre (far left) and Auntie Marie and Uncle Davey Woods (right), 26 June 1965.

the children got on very well. The day after Shirley and George moved in, Jenny, at only 15 months old, scaled the dividing paling fence and invited herself in to play. The Stevens children and the three Kirk children remained playmates for years after.

George had grand plans to make money. One involved turning the house into a restaurant at which Shirley would cook. Shirley's response was that she would walk and take the children with her. Another was to buy a block of land as an investment. They bought a block in then uninhabited Vermont in Shirley's name (for taxation purposes). The purchase price isn't retained, but it sold in 1976 for \$15,000.

In the 1960s, door-to-door vacuum cleaner salesmen were a clear and present menace. One day while the children were asleep, Shirley opened the door to one such menace. He used the trick of sticking his shoe in the door and wouldn't take no for an answer. He threw dirt on the carpet and then showed how his cleaner picked it all up (it didn't). In distress and unable to get rid of him, Shirley caved in and bought one. When George got home, he was furious, and the next day phoned the company and forced them to refund the money. The residual dirt eventually came out.

In 1965, they travelled to Sydney for Shirley's brother Bob's wedding to his first wife, Karen Morgan. Bob worked for the PMG (Post Master General's Office) as an electrical technician, and had just come back from 1 year living and working in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. So their mother, Anne, was very upset when Bob and Karen announced that they were moving to Tasmania for Bob to join the Hydro-Electric Commission. To Anne, Tasmania was self-evidently "overseas", and Bob was abandoning her.

In 1966, impressed by George's abilities, IBM transferred

him back to Sydney, *during* the 2-year contract in Melbourne. So the family spent the first half of 1966 living in a flat in Grasmere Road, Cremorne, once again bringing Shirley and the children in contact with family. Then they moved back to Melbourne for another 7 years of the 2-year contract.

In 1967, Jenny started kindergarten at the local church, St Mark's, which she loved. (Matthew had hated the noise.) Shirley picked her up one day and asked who had been there that day. With a lisp (which Shirley had had at the same age), Jenny replied, "Franthoithe wath there but Franthoithe wathn't" (referring to twin French children, François and Françoise). The distinction was never clarified.

The years 1967 to 1971 saw the family grow in Melbourne. Perhaps to pay for the investment property in Vermont, Shirley took a job as a dressmaker at a garment factory in an inner Melbourne suburb. Most of the women there were recent migrants. One took a liking to Shirley and regularly gave her home-made salamis to take home. Shirley never really worked out what to do with them. To get to work, Shirley bought an ancient black Hillman Minx with a hole in the floor on the front passenger's side, through which the road could be watched during travel. During this period, also, Anne used to come and visit about once a year, taking the Southern Aurora sleeper train overnight from Sydney Central to Spencer Street Station. It was always a special time for the children.

During this time, Matthew joined the Cubs, and on a trip to Trentham, in western Victoria, with George as one of the cub masters, acquired a kitten. She came to be called Dibbies, and became a much travelled cat.

George drove an old Ford Falcon, registration JCA 295. The family called it the "Batmobile", on account of its top





Shirley Stevens



16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley, Vlctoria, 1973. Far left: Shirley; far right: Matthew; on roof: Jenny.

speed of 40 miles per hour (64 km/h). Shirley upgraded to a newer Falcon, JZN 841 .

Keen to keep getting ahead financially, George persuaded Shirley to sell the house in Grenfell Road and buy another at 16 Glendowan Road, Mount Waverley, the other side of the railway line. They paid \$13,900. Unlike the house in Grenfell Road, this house was old—a little weatherboard L-shaped cottage—and had plenty of scope for improvement. So on 1 September 1972, the family moved house. The very next day, the phone was connected and rang almost immediately: it was Shirley's brother John, in Sydney, with the devastating news that their mother had suffered a stroke and died. So with the new house in a shambles, strewn with unopened moving boxes, the family flew to Sydney a couple of days later for the funeral.

Back in Sydney, George set to and arranged a builder to extend the house to his plans, filling in the L to make a square and excavating beneath to make a double garage. The total cost was over \$16,000, more than the purchase price. While working on extending the house, the builder gave Shirley a job typing his correspondence. The income must have helped.

Then IBM, facing a crisis in the New Zealand office, asked George to go to Wellington and straighten out the mess. So exactly 1 year after Anne's death, on 2 September 1973, the family uprooted and moved to Wellington. The cat came too. George relished the challenge and dived in. Shirley, always able to make friends, quickly became part of the IBM set and the local set too, making friends with the wife of the new Prime Minister, Bill Rowling; neighbours in Kelburn, at the top of the Cable Car; and people in the NZ television industry, including the weather man and the science presenter. The chil-

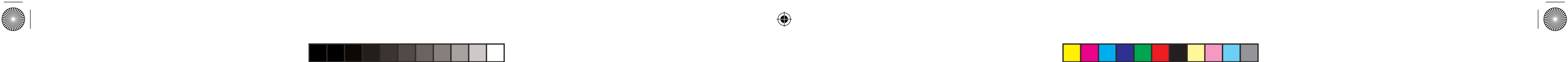
Shirley Stevens



View of Port Nicholson, Wellington, from 1 Harbour View Terrace, Khandalla, 1973.



Jenny and Shirley in the back yard at 2 North Terrace, Kelburn, Wellington, NZ, 1974.







2 North Terrace, Kelburn, taken in 2005.



The Wellington Cable Car, Kelburn.



Jenny, Matthew and Shirley on the beach in Nouméa, 1974.



Dibbies came to New Zealand with us.



dren found it much harder, having had to leave all of their friends behind. The next-door neighbours in Kelburn, the Macdonald family, with four children, proved good friends, and Shirley remained friends with Judy until some years later when a hit-and-run driver killed Judy on a pedestrian crossing. The driver was never found.

The house, at 2 North Terrace, was a 1-minute stroll to the top of the Cable Car, and Matthew used to catch it daily, holding onto the leather strap on the open side in all weathers, on his way to school. Shirley would take it regularly into the city, a 5-minute ride downhill, for shopping. George usually walked to work through the Botanic Gardens, which abutted the Macdonalds’ house, to the IBM building a couple of streets below. Jenny attended the local primary school in Australian-equivalent years 5 and 6 during 1973 and 1974.

IBM agreed to ship Shirley’s car over to NZ. One day Shirley was standing at the traffic lights waiting to cross the road in the city when JZN 841 drove past! It had just come off the ship and was on its way to be cleaned and fumigated. She kept it until the family moved back to Sydney and sold it in Wellington.

The neighbour at 4 North Terrace was an old accountant who, at the age of 93 and wearing trifocal lenses, was still driving his car. On learning that George worked for IBM, he opined that computers would never catch on because they could never replace double-entry book-keeping. They did, of course.

One weekend Shirley and George threw a party for IBMers and friends. A few people were late. So when the doorbell rang, Shirley flung the door open and exclaimed, “You’re too late. The food’s all gone!” But instead of the late guests, she found two enormous Maori men standing there, filling the doorway. Shirley

recoiled in fright. One of the ferocious-looking men then said, hesitantly, “Excuse me. We’re lost. Can you tell us how to get to XYZ?”

### Back home

Having resolved IBM’s problem early and faced with an unhappy family, George ended his posting to NZ and shifted the family back home. He was given a choice of postings, and put the vote to the family. Shirley and the children all chose Sydney. So following a bus tour of the South Island in January 1975, the family flew to Sydney, just in time for the start of the new school year. With jet-lag, the children sat the entrance exam for selective high schools and were immediately accepted into North Sydney Girls’ and Boys’ High Schools. While Shirley settled the family into a rented house in Naremburn (no pets allowed, but the cat came anyway), George engaged real estate agents, and they settled on a double-brick California bungalow at 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, near Shirley’s cousins Betty and Barbara (Cowell, née Osborne), with views up the Lane Cover River. It cost a breathtaking \$65,500, for which George had to take out the first of three mortgages to cover costs. George then spent the next several years renovating the house, demolishing walls, demolishing and rebuilding rooms, enclosing the three outdoor verandahs to make more space, and building a swimming pool. He had intended to do everything himself, but he developed a mysterious arthritis in the shoulders and had to stop for several months, to his frustration. Shirley soon developed the same problem, so it could have had an infectious cause.

While they were recuperating, George, never able to stand still, took up rug making and leatherwork. This led to the establishment of the Cove Craft Cooperative,





Shirley Stevens



Above: 26 Bent Street, Greenwich, NSW. Below: dining room and kitchen.



Above: View of Lane Cover River from 26 Bent St. Below: Ladies of Greenwich Talking and Tennis Club; Betty is seated front left, Shirley front right. Bottom: Nyssa and Alice Mae.



based in Lane Cove shopping centre, with Shirley and George and cousin Betty as founding members. Shirley sewed a variety of children's clothes for sale in the little shop; George made leather belts and wallets; Betty made pressed flower cards; and other members contributed ceramics, paintings, macramé, turned wooden bowls and a variety of other handcrafts.

The renovating resumed, and eventually the house came to cover 28 squares, or 260 m². Shirley made curtains for the house and they bought a number of oil paintings from local artists, making the house a beautiful home.

Soon after settling in, Shirley organised a Woods family gathering. It was only 3 years since her mother had died, and she wanted to have more contact with her aunts, uncles and cousins. Many of them came, giving the children an opportunity to meet their extended family.

Shirley quickly integrated into the local scene, aided by Betty's ties, and joined what became the Greenwich Talking and Tennis Club, with a dozen local ladies who became her friends. She also made friends with various ABC employees, many of whom lived in Greenwich because they worked up the road in Gore Hill, including Caroline Jones and Andrew Olle. She also befriended Jeanette Howard, wife of the then Federal Treasurer and later Prime Minister John Howard, and Jill Dowd, wife of the then State Member John Dowd, who lived a short walk away. The Dowds had three daughters, the youngest of whom, aged perhaps 10, took a shine to Shirley, and would sometimes drop in for a visit. One day Shirley was cooking spaghetti bolognese for dinner when the girl dropped in. Shirley, always happy to talk, was paying scant attention to the task when she saw the girl's eyes go wide and her jaw drop. Shirley had opened a tin of cat food instead of tomato soup and was about to tip it in.

She also helped at both children's schools, contributing to costumes for end-of-year musicals and serving in the tuck shop at North Sydney Girls'. When Jenny was in year 12, Shirley served a young Nicole Kidman, who even then had a coterie of acolytes. The Kidman family lived nearby in Greenwich Road then.

By 1983, Dibbies, who was by then very old, died. On learning of the family's distress, a neighbour over the road, Lana Wells, who was a member of the Cat Protection Society, paid to fly two kittens from Melbourne to Sydney from her former husband, Derryn Hinch, a radio and television presenter (and later Federal Senator), whose then-wife, the actress Jackie Weaver, had asked him to give them away. Derryn telephoned after their arrival to check up on them. Jenny took the call. The cats came to be called Nyssa and Alice Mae. (Years later, Shirley's brother Bob met Jackie and asked her about the cats, but she didn't remember.) The two cats made the place their home. Out the back, they would often lie on the pavers surrounding the swimming pool. Lost in the moment, Nyssa occasionally rolled over while grooming and fell into the pool. Her facial expression as she hauled herself out, bedraggled and dripping wet, was comical. Three blue-tongue lizards called the pavers home too, and the cats could often be seen stepping over the lizards while the lizards stayed put. The cats also found a route from the back pergola onto the roof and around to the front, where they often walked along the guttering, prompting Shirley to surmise that they were riding little bicycles along.

Still keen to make more money, George bought two cabin cruisers from a cruiser hire company on the Hawkesbury River that was upgrading, and restored them to rent out at weekends. He called the business Glendowan Cruisers. The investment required a third





4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich, NSW.



139 Greenwich Road, Greenwich, NSW.



John and Jenny's wedding, Watsons Bay, February 1988. (The Emperor Napoléon's organ is installed in this church.)



Matthew and Linda's wedding, Sydney University, 21 July 1991.  
Standing, from left: Dick Stevens, George and Shirley, Matthew and Linda.  
Seated: Jenny with baby William, Dawn Beaumont (Dick's wife).

mortgage on the house. Yet despite several years of hard work, he only broke even and eventually sold them. So instead of trying to run a business on the side, and as the children had moved out of home to their own homes, he decided to sell 26 Bent Street and buy a doer-upper and so capitalise on the investment through improving the property. So in 1989, George and Shirley sold the house for \$650,000 and bought 4 Kingslangley Road, Greenwich, a short distance away, for \$350,000. They spent a year improving it until George fell out of a tree while lopping a branch and snapped his leg in three places. Surgery, plates and pins, and months of recuperation dented his plans. Only 2 years after moving in, they sold 4 Kingslangley for only \$345,000 and bought 135 Greenwich Road for \$445,000. They turned that two-storey house into separate upstairs and downstairs dwellings. They lived upstairs, with views up the Lane Cover River, and rented the downstairs flat out to a tenant they got on very well with. The cats had come too. Unfortunately, Nyssa fell into the pool one day while George and Shirley were out and drowned.

During this period, first Jenny married John Hutchinson in 1988, and then Matthew married Linda Davies in 1991. Jenny had William in 1990; Linda had Robert in 1992, followed quickly by Jenny with Nicholas; then Linda had Timothy in 1994. Shirley doted on her grandsons, although the relationship of grandparents to grandsons tended to be hands off, perhaps because all of them were boisterous and three of the four were decidedly eccentric.

In 1995, Shirley's brother John died of a heart attack at 64. He had divorced Jacqueline and remarried twice more, but his alcohol dependence and his unwillingness to seek help left him living on a disability pension (he had been severely injured as a child when he was shoved between the platform and a train at Wynyard Station) in a







12 Minerva Crescent, Vincentia, NSW. (Robert is in the foreground.)

mobile home at The Entrance, largely estranged from family and friends. The funeral brought Shirley together with her last aunt, Auntie Eva, and husband Uncle Blue (Walter Moore), for the last time, but it also allowed the grandsons, then still little, to meet a great-great aunt.

Retirement

By 1998, feeling fed up with the hustle and bustle of city life and perhaps wanting to recapture their youth on Jervis Bay, they sold 139 Greenwich Road for \$790,000 and moved to Huskisson, where they lived in a rented house while their next house, at 12 Minerva Avenue, Vincentia (purchased for \$265,000), was extended by the original builder (and vendor). There followed several years of family Christmas gatherings in the house: George and Shirley upstairs and Matthew's and Jenny's families in purpose-built accommodation downstairs, and frequent trips to the beach for swimming, fishing and bushwalking.

Alice Mae had moved with Shirley and George, and every evening she would take her rightful place on Shir-



ley's pink-dressing-gowned lap. Alice Mae had been terrified of the noise of plastic bags since she was a kitten, but with age she eventually went deaf, and calmed down considerably. She developed a thyroid problem, so at the age of 19, she underwent surgery at the vet's and made a full recovery. She eventually reached 21 years, so Shirley and George decided to celebrate this milestone occasion with a 21st birthday party. Various local dignitaries



Shirley Stevens



Above left and below: George and Shirley on a cruise in Greece, 1996. Above right: Shirley and George (with stick) at the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, 6 September 2000.



Shirley Stevens

were invited (neighbours, friends and veterinary staff), and Alice Mae attended wearing a pearl necklace and got to help cut the cake, looking quite nonplussed.

During the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, Shirley and George went on several overseas trips: a cruise around Greece and Turkey on a Russian cruise ship; a tour of England, Wales and Ireland, focusing on the origins of the Woods, Maxwell, Martyn and Stevens families; the World War I battlefields in France and Belgium to see where Glan had served; Hawaii on a cruise; and Norfolk Island and Lord Howe Island. In addition, they toured Australia on several occasions, visiting Kakadu, the Kimberley, the Victorian coast, the Murray River on a paddle-steamer, Tasmania several times, and Glen Innes for the Celtic Festival. On the Russian cruise ship in 1996, Shirley told the story of dinner one night, when a Russian waitress dropped a stack of plates, which smashed on the deck. In the immediate silence that followed, an Australian male voice called out, "Off to the gulag!" In France on 6 September 2000, Shirley and George, along with three others, were invited to participate in the laying of a wreath on the tomb of France's Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris in front of about 200 people. Shirley proudly wore Glan's WWI medals.

Then there was the trip to Glen Innes in 2004 to take part in the Celtic Festival. One evening they went for a walk before dinner, but a broken footpath tripped Shirley and she landed heavily on her hands and face and suffered cuts and bruises. Seemingly out of nowhere, four women appeared and offered their help. While they ascertained how badly she was injured, Shirley noticed that they were all wearing name tags, all of which said "Shirley". It transpired that the women were visiting Glen Innes not for the Celtic Festival but for the Shirley Convention, at which every participant was called Shirley!

By the early 2000s, Shirley had experienced a few transient ischaemic attacks (TIAs, precursors to stroke), and George's physical health had declined remarkably on account of war-service injuries, genetics and his bull-at-a-gate approach to everything, so they reluctantly recognised the need to leave Jervis Bay and return to Sydney to be closer to medical services and their descendants. They sold 12 Minerva in 2003 and bought 78 Lonsdale Avenue, Berowra Heights, not far from Jenny and John. This house, built at the end of a long driveway, was another two-storey home, despite George's difficulty in climbing stairs in the previous two houses. The block abutted the Muogamarra Nature Reserve, and native animals were frequent visitors. Wallabies and kangaroos occasionally came to graze on the back lawn. Turtles wandered out of the garden pond. A pair of pardalotes nested in the garden bed below the verandah. And one day Shirley found a snake studying her through one of the downstairs windows. The house had been built with a double garage on the ground floor, which the previous owners converted into a sunroom. At around this time, Jenny had been building up her personal trainer business and set up a private gym in the sunroom, which Shirley and George dubbed the "ballroom" on account of its size. Jenny's business grew to the extent that she needed to open a larger gym at the Berowra Heights shops, which ran successfully for several years until she moved with John to Singapore on assignment for IBM, thus continuing a family tradition.

George had established the Radio Mechanics' Association in the late 1980s and organised the first of several reunions, in 1992 in Adelaide. Shirley helped in the preparations, and later joined him for reunions in Sydney, Perth, Hobart and Brisbane. Pursuing his interest in family history in association with contacts made at Jervis Bay,





78 Lonsdale Avenue, Berowra Heights, NSW.



16 Wymah Crescent, Berowra Heights, NSW.



Photograph from *Hornsby Advocate* showing Shirley (left), Jenny and Kit Waller (91) in Jenny's studio at 78 Lonsdale Avenue.



George organised a Cornish Cultural Celebration in Nowra in 2008 with the Southern Sons of Cornwall, a family history group through which Shirley was able to trace her Martyn family history.

### The long good-bye

Around about 2002, family members began to notice that Shirley was becoming forgetful, forgetting that she had asked something or retelling something that she had earlier said. George minimised the problem. Over several years, regular assessments by aged care doctors failed to identify a problem. Later, it was revealed that the Mini Mental Score (MMS) test used routinely around the world to test for cognitive decline fails to detect changes due to vascular dementia, which Shirley was suffering. Mild strokes struck periodically, from which Shirley appeared to recover in full, but despite the family's increasing observations of repetition, confusion and forgetting, Shirley continued to pass the MMS. Her naturally social personality gave her the social skills to cover most signs of confusion, and few people were able to spot the evidence. Shirley became convinced that she had had only two mild strokes, but a brain scan revealed evidence of about a dozen.

In 2007, George and Shirley sold 78 Lonsdale Avenue and bought 16 Wymah Crescent, only a kilometre away. This time, the house had a single level and had been built on a level block. They engaged an architect to draw up plans to extend the house, and their builder effectively doubled the size, resulting in a house in which the original rectangular structure provided kitchen, lounge–dining room, bedrooms and bathroom; a new block provided a new laundry, a second bathroom, a sewing room, an office and a garage; and an airy atrium joined



the two. George had intended to develop the garden but he began suffering breathlessness every time he walked a few steps, and had to stop. The diagnosis was right heart failure, which could have been caused by his smoking during his naval service. Unable to work physically and unwilling to stop, he joined a campaign to create a memorial to Australia's Boer War veterans in Canberra. Then one day in early 2010 gathering signatures at the local shopping centre, he caught pneumonia and had to go to hospital. This was the start of his final decline, during which he repeatedly discharged himself from hospital each time he was admitted with something else (including myelodysplasia, prostate cancer, spleen cancer and anaemia) as the hospital didn't run according to his rules. But Shirley was now unable to look after him at home. Jenny spent weeks organising home help services, to which they were entitled for free through the Department of Veterans' Affairs, but too proud to accept help (or, in Shirley's case, unable to see the need), they sacked all of the services except a cleaner.

Things only got worse. Shirley entered the “sundowning” phase of dementia, and every evening (hence the name) would ring either Matthew or Jenny in tears, convinced that George was trying to kill her. Poor George couldn't get out of his chair without help, so he couldn't do anything of the sort, even if he had wanted to. Shirley would barricade herself in her bedroom every night with the telephone, securing the door with a draught excluder, and call in desperation. Every evening, Matthew or Jenny had to talk her down from her anxiety, and the next day Shirley would have no recollection of the previous evening's events.

Several times, George fell over during the night on his way to the toilet. Instead of helping him up, Shirley would step over him on her way to the toilet, and would





Shirley Stevens



Shirley Stevens

then place a blanket over him. By morning he was cold and in pain. One time he was able to reach the phone after hauling himself over the floor and called Jenny (not the ambulance!) at about 5:00 a.m., and Jenny and John had to race there and help him up. But neither Shirley nor George would admit defeat.

Shirley had always kept house for George, and continued cooking his meals, but her failing memory reduced the menu to one item: steamed chicken, steamed broccoli and boiled potato every night. Understandably frustrated at having the same bland food every night (and unable to taste it on account of his medication), George got increasingly cranky, which triggered Shirley's daily paranoia. Shirley simply couldn't understand why George didn't want the food she so lovingly cooked every day.

But every morning was a new day for Shirley, and she would drive to the shops (sometimes several times each day) and buy the same groceries. One day she argued with the supermarket cashier that she had paid, when she clearly hadn't, but the manager gracefully let her have the groceries, probably recognising her declining state. Despite finally being diagnosed with "mild cognitive impairment", Shirley continued to drive to the shops or to Jenny's house every day (sometimes making up her own road rules), so Jenny took steps to have her licence revoked. Although she handed over her licence at the RTA and received an official RTA identification card in return, Shirley had by the following day fabricated a story to fill in the blank in her memory, that the geriatrician had snatched her licence out of her hand and cut it up in front of her. She kept driving, despite no longer having a licence. George facilitated this by hiding the car keys so Jenny couldn't take them, as he was dependent on Shirley and was unwilling to relinquish control to the health services. Eventually Jenny took the keys and sold the car

locally. The fabrication of stories continued. Shirley had been telling a funny story one Sunday during afternoon tea and fell over while acting it out. She grazed her cheek, and Matthew cleaned and dressed it. The following day, she had become convinced that she had fallen out of the car at the shops, and the pharmacist had dressed the wound.

By now, George was reliant on about seven medications to be administered four times a day. The pharmacy supplied them in a 4 x 7 pack clearly marked with the day of the week and the time of day. It should have been straightforward, but as George was barely mobile, he kept the medication within easy reach. Unable to remember this, Shirley would put it away in a cupboard to keep the house looking tidy, so George went without. Being a pragmatist, he hit on the clever idea of taking them all at once every day. Not surprisingly, this didn't work. Following a few weeks in an assisted living home in Hornsby for respite care under the supervision of nurses, Shirley and George returned home to the same shambles, and in only 5 days, George's health had declined alarmingly. Matthew had him taken by ambulance to the Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga, where the triage nurse declared that there was nothing wrong and he should go home. So Matthew drove him to Hornsby Hospital, where he was diagnosed as having had a heart attack and was kept for a month to stabilise his condition. During that period, Jenny frantically tried to find aged care accommodation, and by chance found places at a newly opened aged care home in Wahroonga. Both Shirley and George were moved in, unwillingly of course. George, being fully in control of his faculties, understood the need but continued to fight for his independence. Shirley went on the understanding that it was her job to "look after" George. They moved in in April





Above: Shirley wore her father’s World War I medals in the Anzac Day parades in Huskisson.

Below: Shirley (right) and Beryl at Tallwoods Corner Nursing Home, Wahroonga, 2016.



erty and selling at a profit proved successful. He did manage to create enough capital for their retirement.

During her stay, Shirley’s health declined very slowly, and she remained active and mobile into her last year, even as her memory faded. The geriatrician visited a few times, and was shocked one day a couple of years after George’s death when Shirley asked, “Where’s George?” This was the first time that the geriatrician had seen what the family had been reporting for several years, as without even meaning to, Shirley masked the obvious signs of dementia. Shirley became a valued resident, loved by many of the staff and residents. On account of not having Alzheimer’s disease, her personality never changed. She remained happy and friendly and willing to help. She continued to knit, making squares for assembly into blankets for orphans in Africa; she set the tables in the dining room; she made her own bed. All of these skills slowly faded, along with most of her vocabulary, cognition and self-care skills. Having always been independent, and obsessively maintaining that only her way of doing anything was the right way, Shirley would fight the nurses who tried to help her the “wrong way”. Only one nurse was able to wash her (apparently knowing the right way). Her family continued to visit her weekly. She always recognised them, although she could no longer name anyone, and even 3 months before her death, when viewing photos of herself as a child, recognised herself at the age of about 12 months, saying, “That’s me!”

But in early July 2018, her appetite failed and she slowly faded away, slipping into a coma. She died on 10 July at the age of 89 years.



Shirley in the dining room at Tallwoods Corner Nursing Home, Wahroonga, 2017.



Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens

Certificates





Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens

Form No. 6.

S. Application No. 44/13329



NEW SOUTH WALES.

Registrar General's Department,

Sydney, 19th April, 1944.

CERTIFICATE OF AN ENTRY IN REGISTER OF BIRTHS.

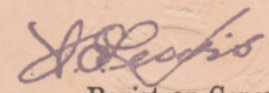
No. of Entry 45586/28

I hereby certify that an entry in a Register of Births kept in this Office in pursuance of the Registration of Births, Deaths, and Marriages Act, 1899-1934, gives the following particulars concerning the Birth of

▼ Nancy Shirley Martyn.

Date of Birth 29th November, 1928.

Birthplace Dubbo, N.S.W.



Deputy Registrar General.



A. H. PETTIFER, ACTING GOVT. PRINTER.

St 1846

TELEPHONES: BW 4231 (6 LINES)

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MELBOURNE, C.I

Atlas Buildings,  
8 SPRING STREET,  
SYDNEY.

23rd August, 1946.

This is to certify that Miss Martyn has been in the employ of this firm since 17th April, 1944, and she is now leaving to take another position more suitable and more favourable for her advancement.

She has the goodwill of the firm and the staff.

While with us Miss Martyn has been engaged chiefly on general office work but she has also acted as a junior stenographer. She has the capacity to develop into a useful office assistant. She is courteous and punctual and she bears an excellent character.



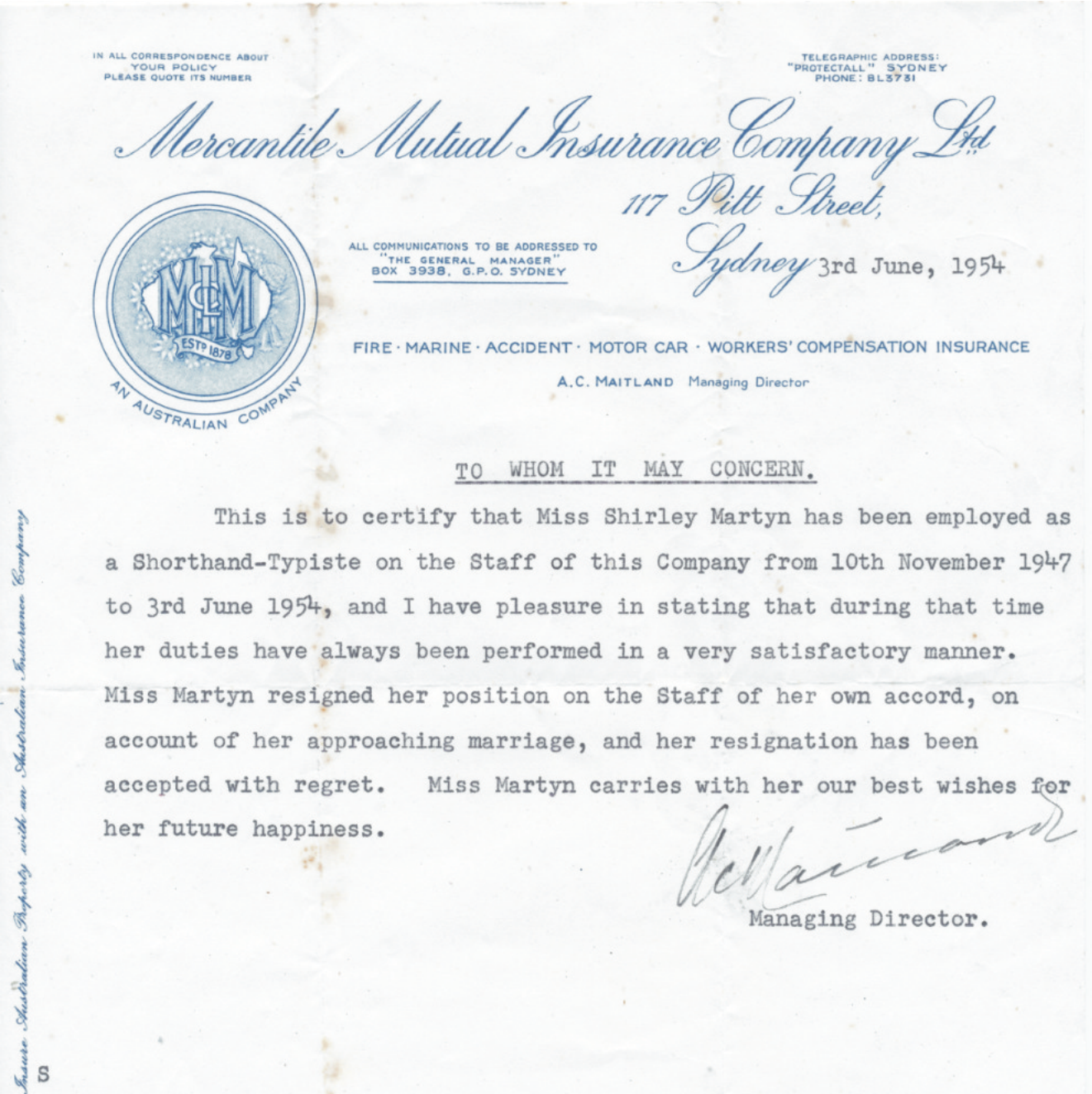
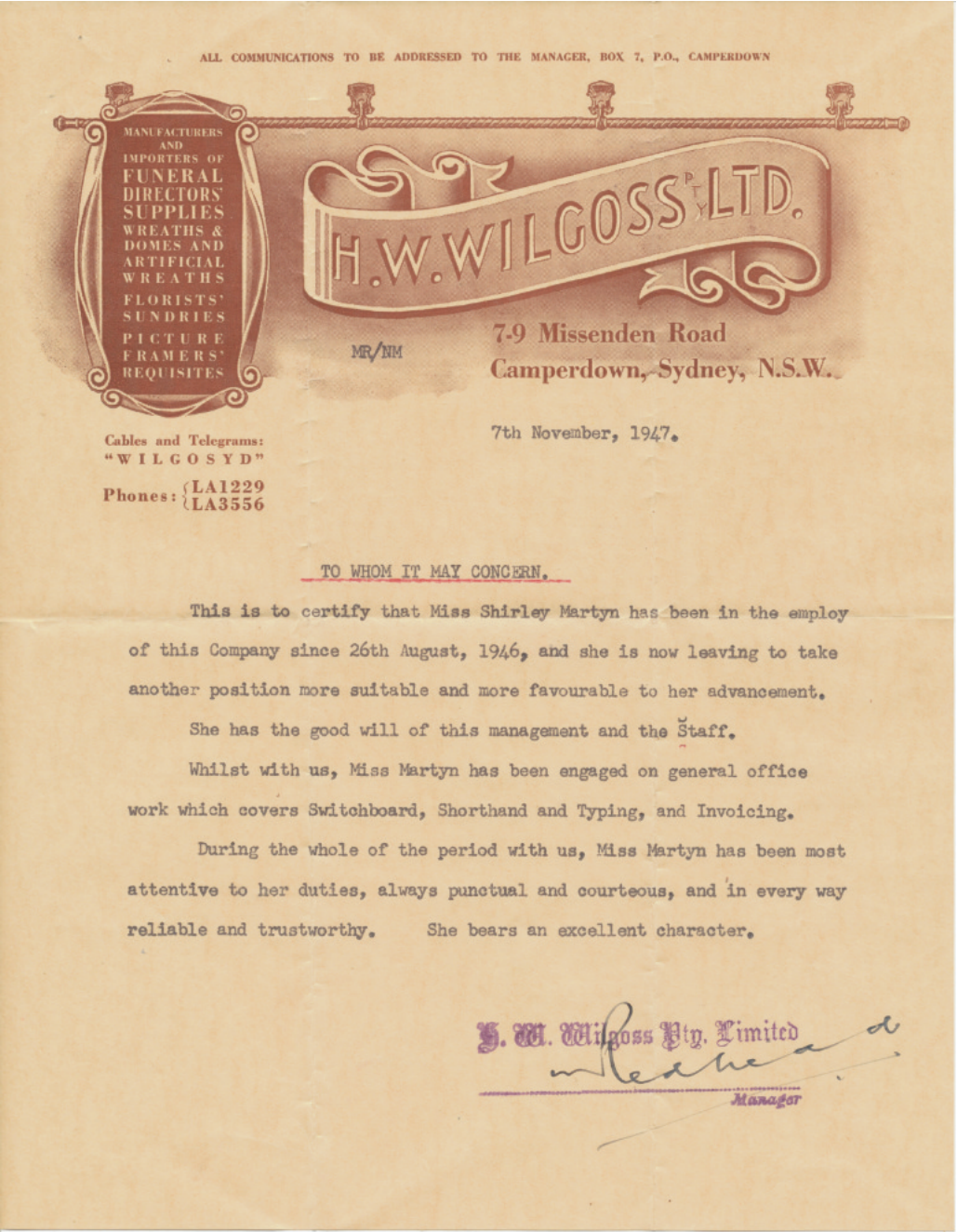
F. A. COCKS.





Shirley Stevens

Shirley Stevens





Shirley Stevens

