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Bro. NORMAN PETER OLSEN (1897-1988)

Norman Peter Olsen was born on the 28th October 1897 and was the youngest of a family of three girls and three boys.

Their parents were Peter Olsen, a naturalised Swedish Mariner, born in Helsingborg, and Elizabeth Scott, a first generation Scot who was born in Honeysuckle Point, a suburb of Newcastle, New South Wales. They were married at St John's Church, Parry Street, Cook's Hill, Newcastle on the 16th December 1885 by the Rev. Francis Ashwood Bode.

On leaving the sea, Peter Olsen later became a member of the N.S.W. Police Force and after a period of service was transferred to the newly formed Water Police attached to Newcastle. The place of residence was at 65 Scott Street, Newcastle, which is just below the present Newcastle Hospital site, adjacent to the wharfs and Newcastle railway station. The old cottage is still in existence and is covered by the National Heritage.

Norman went to Cook's Hill Superior Public School for a period of five years, leaving in 1911. He played the Baritone in the school band in his latter years.

A story Norman liked to tell about those latter years at school was that, as his father was the Sergeant of Water Police, he, in conjunction with the Harbour Master was in charge of the fire fighting on the wharfs and in the local district. When a call came in by that new invention, the telephone, the boys had a set pattern of jobs to perform.

Eric, being the elder, answered the phone and Oscar, the second eldest boy, rang the fire-bell, which was located next door to their home, to summon what volunteers were available. Norman's job was to run down to Newcastle railway station and grab the nearest handsome cab on the rank.

Meanwhile the two elder boys rolled up the fire hose, instructed the volunteers where the fire was located, saw them off on their respective push-bikes, which was an essential to become a volunteer fire-fighter, and then loaded up the handsome cab, which had hopefully arrived by then, if no trains had arrived at the railway station. Norman's duties then included driving to the scene with the cab driver, and helping to unload the fire-hose. By this time, if the building was still standing and a water outlet was close-by, the fire was fought.!!! The good old days?

Back to our story! The following year Norman attended the Newcastle Technical College, completing a course in Carpentry. Not satisfied with this he attended Cook's Hill Evening Continuation School and completed a course in Book-keeping and Business Principles, a course which would stand him in good stead during the years that followed.

