

3719 Fruit growing & cool stores
FRUIT GROWING - Ringwood District
and Refrigeration 1890 - 1945

The soil of Ringwood was once considered so poor that at cattle sales when a beast in poor condition was submitted for sale the expression "Straight off the Ringwood clover" was often heard.

The fruit grower than took over the land, which was considered of little value, and by his industry, has produced crops of luscious fruits, which have not only contributed to the health of the nation, but have added no small proportion to the nation's wealth. The dogged efforts and perseverance of the pioneers of the fruit-growing industry quickly made it the chief industry and mainstay of the district. These enterprising men organised the first Ringwood show, about 1890, and by zealous effort succeeded in raising it to be the premier fruit show in the State.

There is a marked difference in the early methods employed to present day operations. At one time the idea was to grow a great many varieties in order to keep up a regular weekly supply for the Melbourne market. At that time the science of refrigeration had not been applied to the preservation of food stuffs. Later came the idea of specialising, and large blocks were planted out to one or two varieties. After waiting patiently for the trees to bear, the fruitgrower was faced with the difficulty of not obtaining fair crops of fruit through lack of cross fertilization. This factor made it necessary to alter working and planting methods, by using other varieties of the same kind of fruit planted in alternate double rows. These trees produced better crops.

The pioneers had many difficulties to face, Chiefly insect pests, and poor returns for the fruit when marketed. This combination was the cause of many seeking other avenues of employment.

However, the scientist, by experiments proved that with the use of various chemicals sprayed on the trees at varying periods, according to the plant, diseases could be held in check; that insect pests and fungus diseases could be to some extent controlled. Although this system meant extra work and expense to the orchardist, the result was better quality fruit. This innovation, together with the advent of the system of refrigeration being applied to fruit in the form of cold stores, gave a great impetus to the fruit-growing industry.

Through the continued efforts of the local Horticultural Society, together with Mr. Evans, M.L.C. and Mr. J. McAlpin, who was then secretary to the Society, the first portion of the local Cool Store was built, and opened early in 1911, by the Government of Victoria, under a guarantee system, by which the local growers and businessmen guaranteed the Government against any financial loss that might occur. As the accommodation proved inadequate for the growing needs of the industry the Horticultural Society again approached the Government of the day, which acceded to the request, and doubled the storage capacity in 1913. In 1915, the Horticultural Society, at the instance of Mr. P.T. Young, approached the Government with the idea that the Cool Store should be sold to the local fruit-growers with the view to reducing storage fees. After negotiations the Ringwood Co-operative Cool Stores Society was floated in December, 1915, and the local cool stores taken over in January, 1916. Under the new system of management, by which storage charges were greatly reduced, the demand for extra space became so acute that during 1917 the committee of management submitted a scheme to the shareholders for increasing the capacity of the store. At the commencement of the 1918 fruit season the new chambers were available and proved a great boon to fruitgrowers. Later three chambers in the old store were enlarged bringing the total capacity of the store up to 50,223 cases. Ringwood has the third largest store in the Fruitgrowing districts of Victoria.

The great feature in refrigeration as applied to fruit, is that while it has developed a great industry which is utilising land which from an agricultural standpoint, is classed as very poor, it has proved a great boon to the consuming public. By its aid the consumer is able to buy fruit at any period of the year.

COOL STORES AND ORCHARDS Contd. (1959)

The early years of development were marked by enthusiasm in the field of primary production that the march of suburbia has taken away. (1916-1918) In the earlier years of the century Ringwood was a fruitgrowing district rather than an outer suburb of Melbourne and the fruitgrowers themselves a group of men banded together by the common hardness of life. Orchards were laboriously plowed by horse teams, spraying was by a primitive pump and the ~~cheap~~ chemical sprays available to combat pests were limited by the chemical knowledge of the day to a few well tried formulae. In some years, great distress fell on the industry when attacks of insect pests such as thrip destroyed almost the entire crop. Prices generally were low and marketing methods laborious. It was a common sight any evening in the season to see horse drawn ghii hooded waggons of a kind seldom seen today headed down White Horse Rd. for Victoria Market, which they would reach early next morning after a night long trek. The fruit sold, the growers would then head for home, arriving tired probably in midafternoon to face the tasks of the day. Today the remaining orchards are quickly and efficiently plowed by tractor, pest control is more scientific and motor trucks haul the fruit to market in a fraction of the time previously required.

But, though these were years of hardship, they were also a more spacious era. The grower had more time to take pride in his produce, and most were enthusiastic exhibitors at the Ringwood Horticultural Show held in March of each year. In an average year there were 600-700 entries in the ~~fruit~~ fruit section - approximately one-third of the total entries in all classes, which incidentally, varied from flowers to fancywork and from wood-chops and horse events to children's sports.

In 1923 and some subsequent years, the Cool Stores entered an exhibit in the Royal Agricultural Society Show. This comprised a tall pyramid of fruit over a wooden frame. Some successes were gained over similar exhibits from other fruitgrowing areas, but it is on record in several years that the organizers had great difficulty in persuading individual growers to submit suitable specimens of fruit for inclusion in the exhibit.

In 1924 there is a record of experiments such as wrapping of fruit in oiled paper to facilitate its preservation, and about the same time the Ringwood Horticultural Soc. made the request that the grading room in the Cool Store be made available for fruit packing classes under the supervision of the Dept. of Agriculture. These classes, by further arrangement with the Education Dept. were enthusiastically attended in school hours by children of orchardist families. The Horticultural Soc. encouraged the project by offering substantial prizes for the best packed cases of fruit exhibited by school children.

On 1/5/25 there was a fire in the roof of the eastern end of the store and considerable damage was done to the roof and outer walls. There was some damage to fruit, but temporary repairs enabled the fruit to remain in the chambers for the ~~next~~ season.

Cool Stores machinery and plant and buildings ~~from~~ for removal. Owing to expiration of the lease the Auction Sale was held on 2/12/1959

The Cool stores were officially opened on 17/3/1911 by the State Governor Sir Thomas Gibson-Carmichael on
 Cost of erection £5,000. Refrigeration plant £1322
 and making a metal road entrance to the store £81/11/8. Cost of supplying
 was 10,000 cases. *Later cost £56,000* Storage capacity