

Just a little country town, peaceful, law abiding sitting in the shade of fine old trees - that was Ringwood in the coach and buggy days.

The streets were dark at night but nobody seemed the worse for that because Const. Wakeman ( ) Ringwood's one and only cop, kept the place in order. He carried a short length of rubber hose which, applied to the legs of misbehaving young gentlemen in short'uns soon restored them to a proper sense of civic responsibilities.

Orchards then grew practically up to Whitehorse Rd. and we all know stolen fruit are sweet, and besides you're only young once - but golly how that rubber hose could sting a fellow's legs.

Trading in Main St., then a country road, was a mighty different proposition from what it is today. There was a draper's shop (kept by Mr. F. Parker's father) between Adelaide St. and Warrandyte Rd., the Coffee Palace offered comfort to travellers, while the Coach & Horses flourished quietly in the original building on the opposite side of the road. Mine Host was George Wiggins.

The Club Hotel (built by G.T. Wiggins Jr.) took care of thirsty souls a mile each of town. But in between Ringwood was strictly dry.

There was the grocery on the corner of Adelaide St. and the Mechanics Inst. on the site of the present Town Hall and there wasn't much more at all.

In 1914 Mr. Henry Bentley opened his timber mill and yard. At his death two years ago (1957) Alan Coffey Motors bought the property which then included a hardware store, and ran it as the East End Trading Co. P/L. Timber Merchants. Yesterday (April 1959) the contents of the mill and yard were put up to auction. The store will carry on until the goods are sold out.

Half the property has now been sold to Lawfords Furniture and Floor Coverings P/L who will thus extend their present 8,000 sq. ft. (once part of Bentley's) to make one of the largest stores of the kind in the outer suburban area. Negotiations are practically completed for the purchase of the other half by another local firm.

Bentley's Manager is Mr. V. Field who began his business life in Ringwood nearly half a century ago. For the first 20 years he managed Bamfords another well known timber firm which closed down recently.

My first impression of Ringwood says Mr. Field was a little single fronted bookmakers shop. Props. were Carr and Clarke - then the names of the Anglican and Catholic Archbishops of Melbourne.

I lived in Surrey Hills and I had to catch a train at 6.30 in the morning or be late for work. The next train would have got me there in nice time for lunch.

Where the Clock Tower is today the road was then divided into two sections and there was a railing in between. There was a level crossing over the line to Pitt St. Instead of today's overhead railway bridge.

Transport? Well there was Hussey's horsedrawn coach when I first came here. There was a nice to-do the day they moved St. Pauls Church from East Ringwood. It came in two sections and one of them got stuck between the railings of the bridge in Warrandyte Rd. Took a long time to get it unstuck too.

Mr. Field has vivid memories of local characters of the period - of a freelance journalist like Punch's Ally Sloper who was notably formal in his dress and was never seen without his Malacca cane and boxer hat; of the local soak who suffered periodic bouts of D.T.'s during which his feet grew wings and he danced his way through town.

Mr. Henry Bentley lived on the premises gradually building up his business, a shed at a time. His two horse waggons travelled over the Dandenongs, to Healesville and Warburton, in search of timber. They would return with a ~~xxxx~~ ton weight of logs for cutting in the Bentley Mill and each trip would be a full days work.

The firm's business covered a 25 mile radius in the main, although trading was done as far afield as Sorrento, distant Swan Hill and other country places. Back of Bentley's was Mr. Matlock's Livery Stable, and Matlock's growlers and his one handsome cab met the infrequent trains at Ringwood railway station. As the firm developed Bentley's made furniture and sold it in the shop where Lawford's is today. It was really furniture, said Mr. Field who became the firm's manager nearly 25 years ago "none of your modern veneers. Ours was good stuff".

But the two-man show did not take long to develop. At one time 40 men were employed and a dozen casuals would appear in the Spring to make fruit packing cases.

Bill Hone, who served his apprenticeship at Bamfords began working with

Mr. Bentley at £2/17/6 for a 48 hour week

Bill Hone's father was an orchardist round in Warrandyte Rd. and as a young man his main entertainments were a trip to Wirth's circus once a year and a rare visit to Harry Rickards' Opera House (now the Tivoli) But it was just too bad if you missed your train to Melbourne, because trains were so few you'd have to put off your visit to the theatre until the following night.

In the early 1930's Mr. Bentley cut up his horse paddock in Notlen St. and sold it for building blocks.

A still -decipherable advertisement on the subject is painted on a huge notice board at one end of the year. "Look" it reads "beautiful Lots at 25/- a foot in Notlen St. Build your own Home. Three rooms for £245, Four rooms for £325, Five rooms for £425. A number of houses were built by the firm at these prices, in Notlen St.