



SPOT the elegant, old National Bank facade on the Walker Street corner, on the left in this 1945 photograph of Lonsdale Street taken from the top of the Town Hall — in the days before preservation was the watchword and 'progress' was all the go, the building with its fine architectural fabric was to be demolished in the 50s in favor of a modern, glass-fronted, four-storey building that was then the biggest bank building outside Melbourne

SOME years after its beginning as a rutted, sandy bullock track — as the hamlet-turned-village became in 1861 a town, that was in turn to grow into a city — Lonsdale Street used to be soaked from the hydrant on hot, blustery days when the northerlies raised the dust. The retailers it is said really appreciated this service, as no doubt the shoppers did too.

The broad and once rural thoroughfare of the old market town, that betrays its origins as a stock route, remains very much Dandenong's main street. Even in its 1990s guise something of its early character remains; it is simply dressed differently with all the modern attractions that characterise our pacey modern lives.

Lonsdale Street is lined with a wonderfully varied selection of retailers — everything from good old Aussie disposals and factory-direct specials to delectable deli foods, enticing displays of luscious cakes, fabrics, fashions and all kinds of luxuries and necessities for house and home.

There is plenty here for the bargain hunters and all the essentials such as hotels, real estate agents, banks, restaurants, fast foods and food-to-go, the comprehensive medical centre, the big post office (the first post office in the 1850s was in the pub; the first proper P.O. came in 1879) and of course the grand old Town Hall.

Speaking of restaurants it is possible to dine very well here and even on such delicacies as crocodile meat. We may presume, now that it is legal in Victoria, that kangaroo meat could once again feature as it did in the middle of last century at the first Dandenong Hotel, Dunbars, where kangaroo and emu dishes costs two shillings and sixpence!

Today we stroll down the wide, brick-paved footpaths beneath the modern cantilevered canopies of the shops. On either side we see, among other tall evergreens, how the now well-established eucalypts — native trees our forefathers in their civic pride would hardly have countenanced! — are growing to grace the main street that once was lined with an avenue of magnificent Phoenix palms. Though before that Lonsdale Street, in the early days of this century, was noted for a double row of fine shade trees.

All is not lost of that old predilection for the palm, either, for while they may have gone from Lonsdale Street, they have been re-introduced nearby in the Plaza of that name. And some of the magnificent old shade trees of Dandenong stand still, as they have for nearly 150 years, in the beautiful Dandenong Park at the end of Lonsdale Street. Not every main street has such a tranquil area of respite for shoppers and workers virtually within a hop skip and a jump of the centre of the city.