

# eMelbourne

## The City Past & Present

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### Dandenong

(3175, 29 km SE, Greater Dandenong City)

An industrial and commercial suburb, Dandenong has been a regional outpost of the metropolis since its rich pastures attracted squatters in the 1830s. In 1837 official concern for law and order in the colony led to the creation of the Native Police Corps, which until 1852 had its main headquarters in the area now known as the Dandenong Police Paddocks.

Dandenong takes its name from a creek flowing from the Dandenong Ranges into a wide shallow valley, which then merged with the swamps that fringed Port Phillip Bay. Dandenong is possibly a corruption of an Aboriginal *Tanjenong*, meaning lofty mountain. Without an outlet to the Bay, flooding was a frequent hazard in the region until the Dandenong Valley Authority, constituted in 1964, carried out effective drainage works. The Dandenong Creek's flood plains supported magnificent river red gums, whose timbers were used to build some of Melbourne's early structures, such as wharves. Dandenong township probably originated as a timber-cutters' settlement in the late 1830s.

Farmers settling the surrounding districts in the 1850s made Dandenong their market centre, with the first livestock sales taking place around the time the township was gazetted in 1852. The Dandenong market, officially opened in 1866, was situated in Lonsdale Street until 1926, when it shifted to Clow Street where the produce market still stands. The stock market, one of Victoria's main cattle markets, moved to a site beside the railway station in 1958, where it remained until its closure in 1998. Tuesday market day became a local institution, when farmers and townsfolk gathered to trade cattle, sheep, pigs, poultry and produce, do the weekly shopping and exchange gossip.

With the making of the Gippsland Road (Princes Highway) in 1858, Dandenong became a staging place for Cobb & Co. Nicknamed the 'gateway to Gippsland', the

town's significance was ensured as a rail link on the Melbourne-Gippsland line opened in 1879. The Shire of Dandenong, constituted in 1873, covered 60 square miles (155 square km) stretching down to the Bay before 1920, and encompassed roughly the area of the present City of Greater Dandenong before the municipality was divided in 1955, with the larger part becoming the City of Springvale. The grand Palladian-style town hall, built in 1890, proclaimed Dandenong's status in the region.

Early industries complemented local rural activities. A butter factory opened in 1895, and in 1912 the Gippsland Cooperative Bacon Curing Co. built the factory that produced the well-known 'Dandy' range until the 1980s. Hugh Murray began making harrows in 1898, and the firm is still in Dandenong a century later. Another early manufacturer, the Ordish Brick Co., specialised in fire bricks from local clay deposits. However, Dandenong was essentially a country town serving an agricultural community.

All this was to change with extraordinary rapidity at the onset of Australia's postwar boom. Dandenong's wide expanse of flat land, ready availability of power, water and transport services made it an ideal place for large-scale manufacturing. Yarra Falls Textiles led the way in 1947, but it was the arrival in the 1950s of the 'Big 3' - International Harvester, Heinz and General Motors-Holden (just outside the municipal boundary) - that made Dandenong the heart of a new industrial region. A new labour force, including many immigrants from war-torn Europe, also arrived, trebling the population in the 15 years to 1960 to make Dandenong one of Australia's fastest growing regions. In 1957 locals marvelled at the National Bank of Australasia's new four-storey building, reputedly the largest bank outside the metropolis. Large regional branches of business houses and government agencies followed. At first the demands of development were at odds with the pace of life in a country town where livestock was still driven to market through the streets. Dandenong celebrated its boom with a 'Pageant of Progress' to mark the proclamation of the City of Dandenong in 1959.

Dandenong's cosmopolitan nature increased in the following decades, as migrants from all over the world settled, bringing a variety of religious and cultural institutions. By the 1990s Dandenong was home to people of 137 national origins. As an industrial town, Dandenong suffered in times of recession, enduring the problems and the stigma associated with unemployment and social dislocation. Dandenong maintains its regional importance as Melbourne's second largest commercial centre, serving the south-eastern growth corridor.

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#### References

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- Uhl, Jean, 'Dandenong: from slab hut to city', *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. xxxiv, no. 2, 1963. [Details](#)

## Footer

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