

Jack ORDISH

with another friend they had been working with over to South Africa, at the time when the diamond works were going on. They worked at Jagersfontein and Bloemfontein South Africa. Then they came back here just before the Boer war started. One of my uncles went back to fight in it, but not my father! He'd seen enough of it. By the time I was born, in 1904, he was back as a building<sup>er</sup>, which he was for most of his life. The only time he was out of it was during the First World War when he went to the war for a time.

I was born in the house next door here, and I've lived between that house and this all my life! I haven't shifted far have I? My father built that one and I built this one.

One of the earliest memories I can remember was being taken by my father up to my uncle's brick works, which was up in Stud Road. At that time I would have only been about <sup>4</sup>for, I would say. I remember him carrying me up there to go and see my uncle about some business. I think he used to manufacture bricks, for building houses and that type of thing, and I think my father went up there to see about getting some bricks, or seeing him about some other business. I remember the big brick kilns - the old beehive ones with fires all around them. Once they'd put the bricks in, the fires had to be kept going all the time. Of course it was on a smaller scale than what it is today, but still it was a marvellous sight. They used to be fired with wood in those days - local timber. People used to cut the wood for them and cart it in; they used to have their own lorries and vehicles for carting in the wood.

The town then was composed of mainly small shops. One section of the main street up here from Scott Street to Clow Street, there were vacant lots in there; vacant land with fruit trees growing in some places. They were all small shops then. The only two storey buildings in those times were the hotels. The main street looked quite a lot different to what it does now. I don't know whether you've seen any of the old photos down at the Historical Society. Most of the shopping area was on the west side of Lonsdale Street. The post

office has always been in the same position as it is today.

There were very few shops on the east side, it was mostly taken up with the market. It was right down opposite the shops at that stage - it went from Clow Street down to past the end of Scott Street. Along, around the side of the shops on the east side, that was taken up by stall holders, vegetable growers, lolly vendors, clothing and so on.

It was a lot more friendly in a way, everybody knew everybody. Not like today. If I go down the main street today, I'm very fortunate if I know from one to three people. The people who came in to see<sup>l</sup> their vegetables and things, were local farms<sup>21</sup>, not professional marketeers like you have these days. They were all growers. They produced the vegetables and brought them in to sell at the market. I went down to see the market every Tuesday.

Compared to kids these days I think we were brought up more that we had to do something around the house, and to help in the home. My salary was a penny a week for getting the morning wood and running the messages. If I failed to do one or the other, without complaint, the salary was cut out. Actually, a penny a week was probably fairly generous in those days, and when it was raised to 3d a week I would have called the king my uncle! I felt that flush! At the time I got a penny I used to go, on the way back to school, through the market and buy a penny's worth of honeycomb - that bought a large bag. It was eaten by the time I got to school.

I went to the East school, Foster Street, 1403. That was the only school here in those days. There were no other schools, no high schools, no technical schools. I remember my first day at school. My cousins took me to school, two of them older than I was, and they took me to school, but for some reason they didn't wait to bring me home, so I had to find my own way home as best I could. Another school friend living in the same street brought me home, so everything was alright. I wasn't in tears, but I thought it seemed a long way, although it is only about half a mile.

The school building was practically the same as it is today, the old original part, which was a brick building. I had good teachers. I remember my first teacher in the - I don't know what they called them - the babies, a Miss Redoubt. She was a very good teacher. She always seemed kind. If you were in trouble, she was always there to help you out. The other teachers were good; there was a Miss Orville, two Miss Austins - they were sisters. One Miss Austin is still alive. She must be very near 90 now. So many people seemed to have been taught by her. She's really an institution. Strict but kind. Yes, she was a good teacher. I don't remember any I didn't like, I seem to have got on well with all the teachers. I never had any trouble. I know some of the other scholars used to fall foul of some of the teachers, but I never had any trouble. I wouldn't<sup>t</sup> say I was perfect, and I wasn't dull, I was sort of the happy medium. I had no problems with learning, and I had no problems with doing my work.

I suppose some of the boys today wouldn't like to hear this, but we used to do darning, and sewing - that's why I'm never stuck if I have to put on a button for myself. This was with the sewing mistress one afternoon a week. We used to have a pattern with a design of fruit drawn on a piece of paper, and then you had to do this pattern with wool to form the fruit. We had spelling; we used to do spelling in class. They used to write the spelling on the board, and you had to write it down, and then they'd give you a mental test with spelling. "You spell so and so". I think we were taught more how to spell in those days than the children are today. Same with arithmetic. I'd never hear today of children at school doing what we used to call 'long tots'. The teacher used to write a great long list of a number of figures on the board and he'd point out someone and say, "Add it up". You had to stand up and add it up, looking at the board. If you got it right, very good, if you got it wrong, you got a severe reprimand. Then there used to be a very great performance of the headmaster; he used to go round and visit various

classes at various times in the morning. He was a great one on mental arithmetic, and he used to put two numbers down on the board and you had to add it up, and he used to say, "10 and 20, 14 and 16", and so on and so on. I don't know whether they do that in school today, I don't think the mental arithmetic is taught too much.

At play times and at lunch time we used to play all sorts of games. We used to play some games where we used to line up in two lines, and we used to have what we called "crows and cranes". On boy, or sometimes some of the masters, would call out "Crows" - the crows had to chase the cranes, or the cranes chased the crows, just getting caught out until there was none left. We used to play other games, perhaps ball games. We used to usually have a football, and in cricket time we used to have a game of cricket. The only thing was that we had to get out on the side street, on the New Street footpath to play cricket. The masters wouldn't allow us to play in the school because it was too dangerous for other children who perhaps would get hit with the ball. Then there was the people who used to live opposite the school - of course the ball used to always be going over their fence, and they'd get a bit annoyed!

I was at primary school when the first war was on. It made quite a lot of difference to school. We used to have collections for the Red Cross. There were no comforts funds in that war, only Red Cross, so they used to run collection days on Tuesdays. We also had what they called the flower day. We used to make up bouquets of flowers and sell them to people in the street, and round the market. This was all organised through the school. Once I was detailed to go with others down to the railway station where we used to meet people going on the trains, and people coming off the trains. Of course there wasn't the road transport here that there is today. Only trains or people's own vehicle transport.

I don't remember that the war affected much else, there didn't seem to be any problems, not in those days, not with either teachers or parents. The

The fathers went to the war and mothers just seemed to carry on as usual. But of course I wasn't very old.

After school, if there was any time left after you did your chores, you'd perhaps go to a school mate's place and have a game with them, or sometimes we used to have a bit of a game at night. We used to go out and have what they used to call a bit of a play of tallyho - one or two fellas would hide, and the rest would all go round and try to find them. Just below here there was a house that had a big cypress hedge, and for a long time the others never thought to look up on the top of this hedge. And two of us used to hide on the top - we'd climb up over the fence alongside, and lay flat on top of this cypress hedge. Finally, somebody found out we were there.

At weekends our rendezvous used to be mainly out to what was the Police Paddocks. Its now Churchill Park. It was all bush then, other than the homestead and buildings where they used to have the black trackers. There used to be sometimes perhaps 4, perhaps 5 of us used to go as a team out there. We usually had a couple of dogs. Of course we walked, although later on in life, perhaps a bit later on that this, we used to sort of half ride and half walk because the Serle boys' father, who was a coach builder, bought them a little pony and built them a little cart, and they used to drive around in this little pony and carts. Sometimes we used to take it in turns, perhaps three would <sup>w</sup>alk and two would ride, otherwise it was too heavy on the little pony! When we used to get out there, it was either bird nesting or chasing possums, or in the blackberry season, gathering blackberries. But we used to endeavour to get up near the homestead to have a talk with the black trackers, and they used to show us how to throw boomerangs and spears, and make spears - not boomerangs.

They also used to show us how to catch snakes. They used to get a forked stick - ti tree stick with a fork. They used to point the two forks, and they'd walk alongside the snake and they'd put that over his head and pin him down. Of course he used to do all the wriggling and what have you, but he

couldn't get away. Then they'd kill the snake by cracking its back, like cracking a whip. He'd hold the stick with one hand, grab the snake's tail with the other, releas<sup>e</sup><sub>^</sub> the stick and just crack its back. Now, I've never seen that done since I was a boy until we went for a holiday in 1969 (when I retired from work) to Western Australia. We went over through the Nullabor. Coming back a council truck passed us on the road, I think it was part of South Australia. We were in the bus, and we saw this truck pull up, a chap jumped out, he went into the middle of the road and he picked up this snake by the tail and cracked its back. I said to my wife, "I've never seen that done since I was a boy with the black trackers". That's what they used to do. And of course they used to train the horses there. They used to break them in for the police. The man in charge of the Police Paddock then was named Falkiner. Then a man named Downs came there, and I think the last man there was Mr. Haygarth. That was before they shifted over to Bundoor<sup>a</sup><sub>^</sub>.

To go to the Police Paddocks we could get in bush up towards Herbert Street in Dandenong, go through bush over towards Stud Road. We had to dodge my uncle's brick yard because you couldn't go in there for dogs - I got roared up once when the dogs ran over the wet bricks. Then we'd go down through more bush down the back of the brick yards, and then we'd come to a clear<sup>a</sup><sub>^</sub>ance at the corner of Heatherton Road and the creek. Well now, to get into the Police Paddocks you either had to go on one side or the other of the creek. On one side people named Ring lived there, and they always had a Verocious bull. So you had to watch where this bull was, and if the bull was near the creek, you had to go over on the other side of the creek. The other side of the creek was property owned by, he was a retired sea captain, a Captain Commands, and he had a man who was an overseer of the property who didn't like boys going through there with dogs because they used to disturb his sheep. So if Ring's bull was near the creek, you had to run the gauntlet and risk stirring up the sheep.

In those days you had quite a lot of freedom to come and go as you liked, to roam around. There were no worries about roaming. You could come and go in people's places - everybody knew everybody. We never did anything wrong, we didn't steal, we didn't break things down. If you opened a gate to go in you shut that gate to make sure you'd always be allowed back another time. Otherwise, you let the stock out and that was the end of you.

On Sunday we all went to Sunday school. I started Sunday school when I was 5 years <sup>f</sup>og age. When the Sunday school first started over here, you were all just in one big class. There was no distinction between ages, until you came to a short lesson at the end, and then you were just divided up and sat in the seats with a teacher on a chair in between two rows of seats. I grew up right through the Sunday school until I was about 17 I think, then I was pooled in as a teacher myself.

Most social life revolved around the church. We used to have a monthly social, then of course there was church on Sunday, there was Sunday school, church perhaps in the morning, perhaps at night, and any functions we used to hold - picnics, and get together to visit people's homes for different functions and parties. Practically all revolved around church life.

There<sup>was</sup> a particularly large methodist community here. We used to have a Sunday school with about 100 to 150-200 sometimes. Methodist was the strongest congregation, and the strongest Sunday school and the strongest choir (I didn't sing in the choir. I did everything but sing in the choir!). I don't know why, but its always seemed to be a very strong following really, right from the time I can remember. Some of the leading citizens were Methodist. A Mr. Renfree here was one of the early general store owners, <sup>was</sup> ~~and~~ a strong methodist. I think the man before him, a Mr. Ruddick, was a strong Methodist. The Cadle family were strong methodists. But the <sup>Titchers</sup> ~~teachers~~ were church of England.

We always had a Sunday school picnic: every year we had a Sunday school picnic on Cup Day. Sometimes we went to the beach, anywhere from Mordialloc to Frankston, and sometimes we went to the Hills. We went to Ferntree Gully

but we never got as far as Emerald Lake, not in my day. I knew it was there because I used to go and visit my uncle and aunt who used to live at Emerald and Gembrook. When I was a boy we used to go up there, and I used to try and race puffing billy along the railway line. I used to ride a pony all around the hills there, in those days. Now I go up there and I can't even find my way about, now its all cleared and built on. I can only find the house where they lived.

We very rarely went away ~~for~~<sup>at</sup> for holidays at Christmas time. We used to go away more at Easter time. We used to go up to Gembrook, Emerald, as I've been speaking of, or to another aunt at Greensborough. We never went away at Christmas. The only time we used to get away was perhaps Boxing Day or New Year's day to the beach at Mordialloc.

I used to help father when he was building: it used to be fun because I think my father always treated me as an equal. He<sup>n</sup>ever said, "You've got to do this, you've got to do that", but rather "Now, you help me do this, I'll see if we can help you to do something else", you know. Always treated as equals, we were more friends than<sup>n</sup> we were, you know, father and son. All the same, he tried to talk me into being other things than a builder. He tried to talk me into being a school teacher, he tried to talk me into an office job, and I said, "No, I'm going outside in the fresh air!"

It stayed at~~p~~ Primary school until the high school started. The high school started here in 1919 after the First World War: I was one of the first pupils. I started the same year as Jean Cussen. Jean and I were in the same class. There was no school built at that time so we started here in the old Fire Brigade Hall, the Temperance Hall and the Church of Christ Hall. That was our school. It was nearly two years I suppose before the other school was built. Certain classes were allotted into certain buildings. I started off, I think, in the Fire Brigade, then I was in the Temperance Hall. I was never over in the Church of Christ building. I moved into the new building just after it was opened, but the year after<sup>that</sup> I started work.  
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Our play spot in those days was <sup>w</sup>here <sup>^</sup>Mason Street is now, which was unmade. That's where we used to play football and cricket and what have you.

High school was the same as primary school - a pretty good place. We had very good teachers. Mr. Langford was the first head master, he was a very good teacher, he was a returned man from the first war. We had Mr. Brooks and Mr. Gibbs, I think they were returned men too. A Mr. Stevenson, I think, was the other man. We had a Miss Frusher (?), she was the senior teacher. I never had any faults with them. Miss Kirkham (she was the French teacher) was very good, but the only one I perhaps didn't see eye to eye with: I couldn't push this French into the back of my old skull! I'm afraid I didn't get a very good mark in that respect. No, I always got on very well with the teachers, never had any troubles or complaints at all.

I was about 16 or 17 when I finished school and went to work. Apart from wanting an outdoor life, I think one of the main things that made me go into building was wanting to be with my father. He always liked building, and I seemed to like it, and I think that was the main reason. My father built mostly in Dandenong, Dandenong and outlying areas. I think the furthest I travelled with my father to build would be to, oh, Malvern, Glenhuntly, Pakenham. Mainly he built houses - a few shops - in timber or solid brick. At that time of course there was no such thing as brick veneer. Brick veneer was unheard of. It was either solid brick or timber.

I started off as the messenger boy on 7/6d a week. I can't really remember what I did with it. I suppose I spent it on a few things, perhaps on lollies and what have you's. Mum and Dad <sup>used to</sup> supply me with my clothes, and I didn't pay any board, so that 7/6d would have gone quite a long way. When I first started I mainly had to get the tools out; pick up the tools when the men had finished; run the messages; gather up all the scraps laying about from under the men's feet; put the billy on - the billy was always put on about a quarter to twelve. I had to see that the billy was put on and boiled. I think that was the main thing most of the time. I suppose you might say I was apprenticed for about 12 months (formally apprenticed, that is)

till I gathered enough know how to be able to carry on and work with the men. There was no proper teaching, they just used to teach you as you went along. As you were doing the job they used to say, "Now you do this this way, this is how you do this" and they explained why they did these things, and how they did it, and that's how you learnt. Today I think there's a lot more theoretical work, less practical work - a lot of theory. Well now, the theory is really no good without your practice.

In my later life I became a building inspector for the city of Springvale. I was there for 13 years. Now, they put on a young lad down there - he was a very smart boy, very good at theory, but he used to say to me as I went round on the jobs (I used to take him round to try and teach him what he was expected to do), "Look, I could not do what you do". He said, "A man comes to you, and he says, 'Now you've asked me to do a certain thing. If I do so and so, will that be equal to what you've asked me to do?' You either say 'Yes' or 'No'. I could not do that because I've not had practical experience, and I wouldn't know whether one was equal to the other. What am I going to do?" And I said, "Well, your only chance, if you want to learn, is to get weekend experience on practical instruction. Other than that, I don't know how you're going to work it, because the only other way is to try and manufacture something in your own back yard and get a builder in there to advise you and help you, and show you what to do". You see, you must have them both, practical and theoretical, together. You can't have one without the other. I think its unfortunate today that there's too many theory men and not enough practical men. Now I know this applies in building inspecting. There are too many lads - I'm not saying they're not good, but as far as their practical experience, its almost null and void. Reading it out of a book and putting it into practice is vastly different.

On the other hand, what we did at school did help me a bit. You see, education at the high school and the state school, you got a good grounding in arithmetic. At the high school you got a good grounding in geometry,

trigonometry, and they all helped in building construction. But I practically taught myself plan drawing; there wasn't any of that in the schools. The nearest you could go for that then was what used to be called the Working Men's College, where the RMIT is now. Swinburne, I think, could have been going, but there was no school at Caulfield or anywhere near like that at all.

The town didn't seem to change much during the time I was at school and my early working years. It really didn't change until after the second war, not what you would say was a major change. Neither did my way of life change much when I started working. It practically centred round the same thing. Might have gone out more as I grew older, to the local dances, and we used to go to the city to theatres and the pictures. But I suppose the main grounding was there and you didn't depart very far from it.

I stayed working with my father all the time until he died and then I more or less carried on. I had been working on my home, like with him just advising me, not on the construction part, but on the contracting part - in case the young fellow forgot something, or left something out - price and the like. We were married in 1935. We've got no children, but we've watched our nephews and neices grow up in Dandenong.

In some respects its a better place now: there are more advantages with working facilities; there are more factories, there are more places of employment. You see, in my young days you either had to work for someone building and contracting or plumbing, otherwise the only two places where you could get employment as far as factories were concerned, over at the brickworks or the bacon factory. I didn't want to work in either of those. In some respects its not as good. More pitfalls, places to lead young people astray today than there was in my day. We had very few distractions leading anyone astray compared with what they have today - the pinball machines down in Thomas Street and things like that. There's too many young people go in there that shouldn't go in there at all.

I had over 30 years in the building game before I was semi-retired and went for a job as an inspector. Over that time there were ups and downs.

Well of course in between the war periods it was very good, there was ample work. We hardly had to look for work because people would be chasing you to come and work for them - build houses, sheds and shops and so on. Then of course we got into the depression stage, of 29, 30's. When the depression was on and you could not get a job. You'd walk the soles off your boots looking for a job.

It affected everybody. It affected us this way: you couldn't get a job as far as building was concerned, you had to take anything that came long. I know my father and I went out on to farms doing fencing round farms, doing alterations to cow sheds, dairies, hay sheds, anything you could get. But in some ways father was pretty lucky - I don't think he had many bad debts. I think I collected far more later on when I was on my game, than he did!

As far as the town was concerned, shopkeepers had a very hard time because people couldn't pay for their goods. My mother had some property that she had let, but she couldn't get rent from it - she had to let the people live there, pay want they could, when they could, if they could. It was only the drastic people who put people out of homes and that sort of thing, and then they couldn't do any good because after they put them out, they couldn't see<sup>l</sup> the property - they could do nothing with it. I think the people of the town mostly stood on their own two feet. The only time perhaps that they more or less stuck together was perhaps through relationships. If a relation was sort of down and out I think the rest of the family came and helped them a bit. Other than that I think most people sort of battled on their own as best they could.

We managed to keep our home and just had enough to live. This went on for 10 to 12 years. In '29 I think it started, until about '33, and then there was a minor pick up and then the war. I suppose that affected me a bit, a bit late in life getting married, but there you are - you had to gather some funds first. One of the first places we built then, after the depression in about 1934 (It'll show the difference in the price of houses now), was a two

storey brick house, solid brick: 1500 pounds. How would you like one today? You could get bricks for less than 3 pounds a thousand, delivered wherever you wanted them.

The second war of course played a bit of havoc with the town. Of course a lot of the younger men enlisted, proportionally far more than in the first war. There was no work of course, everything practically closed down you see. You ~~either~~ had to be in a supply industry which was free of conscription. Now, the brickworks was an item like that - they were free because they were manufacturing goods that were being used for the army. You had to manufacture bricks to keep industry going - foundries, you see, these fire bricks were used in foundries, they were used in engines, all those sorts of things. Well, that was a protected industry (That's the word I was trying to think of!) and of course the bacon factory, that was food manufacture and that was protected too. Everything else was out, and I think most of the chaps who didn't enlist were taken off in the army service.

I was in the army service business, building for the army. We were sent around all over the place. I started off first building stores (we were under big contractors), building stores at Braybrook. I was there for some time, then we were taken down to Geelong. When I finished up at Geelong, I was headed for Darwin. Then this contractor got some more work locally, and I was taken with him again, otherwise I would have been at Darwin when it was blown up. They wouldn't take me in the army because I'm short of a few fingers. It didn't affect me as a builder though. At least during the war I was a bit more secure than during the depression years, because I had a regular wage.

The boom on the buildings and industry didn't really come here until after the second war. The first industry that came here was International. They came here because after the war when everything was progressing ~~and~~ there was a shortage of power on the other side of the city, so they came here to Dandenong to be on the receiving end before the power got to the city. Then after that, of course, Heinz came, GMH, and all the others here have all followed.

I did construction for some of the houses for the workers. I didn't get involved in any of the big construction, because you either had to have a lot of employees, and the more employees you had the more trouble you had. I found that if I had anything up to about ten men working I could supervise the work and make money. When I got over that I found that you employed some fellows who didn't want to work, or did as little as they could, and you found that you went down. In those days you had to work anything from three to four jobs because you had trouble with supplies. While you were working on one job, you were building up supplies on the others, so that you could move from one to the other. Then you'd have to have jobs in various stages: you'd have to have jobs under the frame construction, and you'd perhaps have another one where you had the frame up and bricklayers were working on it, and you had another one where it was being enclosed or you had it in the finishing stages, and so on. I was involved in the expansion down South and round the Keysborough area, the Noble Park Area.

From then of course there was a vast number of people came here. The town started to expand, more <sup>o</sup>shops were built, offices, all sorts of other types of buildings to what we had, more manufacturers and small business people. It developed from a friendly community to a community of hustle and bustle - hard to cope with for anyone who'd lived here from their boyhood days to their old age! We learned that we'd come from a small country town to a city where everybody was in a hurry, and nobody knew anybody, nobody had time to talk to anybody and it seemed a vast change from a quiet locality to hustle and bustle. In the early years, if you went down the main street <sup>t</sup><sub>^</sub> of Dandenong on a Saturday morning, it'd take you all your time to get any business done because you'd meet that many people you knew, and they'd all want to talk to you, that you had to almost offend some people to get about your business. Nowadays, you go down the street and if you meet one to three people you know, you think you've done a marvellous day's work! Other than the people in the shops of course.

In business, where before you more or less knew all your potential clients, what their backgrounds were and what their finances were, well, you had to be more cautious then. But of course, since the latter days mainly, you see I haven't been in the building business. When I got to the stage when the eyesight was giving out, I thought that to be on plans and prices and quotes and figures wasn't such a good idea. So I applied for this job when Springvale divided from Dandenong and I went there as an inspector. It involved a certain amount of more figure work and inspections, but no problems and complications as far as contracting was concerned.

I would think the town changed most during the time when the big industries started to move in here. Then it seemed to change very rapidly. A vast number of people came to live here, the town seemed to change very much as far as the type of population is concerned. I don't think the old established town people had much say about it. I don't think even the people of the town got any benefits from it whatsoever. It<sup>w</sup><sub>^</sub>as practically all outside people who more or less made the change - and they got the benefits from it.

The main ones are really all over the border in Berwick shire. The council had a vote here about changing the boundaries - this was just after the main industries cam<sup>e</sup><sub>^</sub> here - and to my mind the council had a really good case if they'd have forced the issue at the time. When the industries came here they had no facilities, the shire of Berwick wouldn't put in any facilities for them because they had no ways and means of putting in facilities such as sewerage and water and telephones. They hadn't progressed like Dandenong. You see, it was still a country council. Anyway, when it came to a vote, instead of the Dandenong Council saying "Well, if you want these facilities you go to Berwick, we won't give them to you, or can't give them to you, you go and get them off Berwick" (then these people would have fought Berwick to have the boundaries changed to come into Dandenong), the Dandenong Council said, "Oh yes, we'll help you, we'll give you all the facilities". But then later, when they found that if they'd come in with Dandenong, their rents would have been

higher than they are at Berwick, so they said "No, we'll stay with Berwick".

Dandenong supplied all the goods and got nothing for it.

In Dandenong today, I think the present situation seems quite alright. They might be having a little bit of a hard time, but its nowhere in comparison to the depression. You hardly see anybody who seems to be unemployed. If you go down the street you don't see anybody loitering about, you don't see anybody as though they are hard up, their clothes almost falling off them, like a lot of people were in the depression days. They had nothing even to buy food. Nowadays, they can get substance to buy food. There's not the amount of want that there was in the depression.

ORDISH

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Your family is one of the very oldest in Dandenong, that your grandfather came here quite some time ago.

Yes, grandfather arrived here in 1857.

and why did he come to Dandenong?

Well, he came out here first from England, married, with my grandmother, and came out from Derbyshire in England. He came out here to take up land. But for a while he took up a job as police constable at the time when the gold rush business was all on, and he took up the job as police constable.

That wouldn't have been Dandenong would it?

Oh no, he was sent to Bendigo on this episode ....? I'd better be careful...

No, no..... you just go ahead...

... and he was instructed to go up there with the idea of cleaning up the sly grog shanties around the diggings. When he arrived there he found that the sly grog shanties were occupied by women and children while the husbands were out searching for gold, so he wouldn't burn them down. He sent word back to the authorities to say that he didn't come 12,000 miles to burn out women and children from their homes, and asked for instructions. So they sent word back and told him he'd received his instructions and to carry them out. So he resigned on the spot.

Good on 'im! So what did he do?

He took up for a while at a place called Mucclesford. I'm not quite sure of the name, but it's up that way near Castlemaine. They were only there for a short time, and then he came down here to Dandenong because he could see there was more progress taking place here....

.... and the country would be nearer.... for farming conditions to England than it would be up the other way.....

...so then he took up some land down on the South of Dandenong, and they've got a road named after him there... Ordish Road, that was of course when they first came to Dandenong, but it wasn't long after they arrived out here from England, they weren't very long in the Castlemaine area.

So your grandfather and your father were farmers then? Or graziers, or.... Well, yes, you could take it as smallholding. I think they were mostly more intensive culture with agriculture and pig raising, I think, more than anything else. This was before there was any family in the first instance, but then they were living on a property in Foster Street, Dandenong, and that's where the family were all born, there.

And what was your father? What did he do?

My father was a builder....

That would have been a pretty good time for builders then, wouldn't it? Except for the 1890s....

Well then yes, in the depression time, or the land boom time as they called it in those days, there'd be no work about, and he and a mate went over to another friend they had been working with, who went over to South Africa at the time when the diamond works were going on, and they worked at Jagers from and South Africa. Then they came back here just before the Boer war started.

Yes... they weren't tempted to go back and fight in it?

Well, one of my uncles did, but not my father!

He'd seen enough of it... Well what was he doing at the time you were born in 1904?

Builder.

Back in the building trade, and he stayed in that for most of your life? Most of his life, yes. The only time he was out of it was during the First World War....

When he went to the war....  
for a time.....

Were you born at home?

I was born in the house next door here, and I've lived between that house and this all my life!

(laughter....) Really?

I haven't shifted far have I!?

No, you haven't! When I came I thought, now this is one of the older houses, you've probably lived here virtually all your life.

Both of the houses built by your father?

Well, my father built that one, and I built this one.

You started out as a builder too. Oh, we're jumping ahead now, let's go back to when you were first born. Do you remember at all ... what are your very first memories of Dandenong. Now its probably a bit hard, because you've lived here all the time and things sort of get mixed up along the way, but have you got any very early memories....

One of the earliest memories I can remember was being taken by my father up to my uncles brick works, which was up in Stud Road. At that time I would have only been about four, I would say. I remember him carrying me up there to go and see my uncle about some business. I think he used to manufacture bricks, for building houses and that type of thing, and I think my father went up there to see about getting some bricks, or seeing him about some other business. That's the first time I can remember.

Do you remember the big brick kilns, did you see them that day?

Big fires and everything?

Yes, yes. Of course it was on a smaller scale in those days to what it is today, of course.

But even so, the sight of those big kilns is really something incredible, isn't it?

Yes, yes. The fires had to be kept going all the time, and once they'd put the bricks in the fires were kept going...

Would they have been the old round ones with fires all the way round?

That's right. The old ones with ...

Beehive.... and what did they use to fire them?

Wood in those days. Local timber, yes. People used to cut the wood for them.

They used to cart it in, they used to have their own lorries and vehicles for carting in the wood.

Do you remember what the town was like in general. Did you go shopping with your mother?

Yes. Town then was composed of mainly small shops. One section of the main street up here from Scott Street to Clow Street, there were vacant lots in there. Vacant land with fruit trees growing in some places. They were all small shops then. The only two storey buildings in those times were the hotels. They were mainly the only two storey buildings in the town.

The main street must have looked quite a lot different to what it does now.

Yes. I don't know whether you've seen any of the old photos down at the Historical Society... Most of the shopping area was on the west side of Lonsdale Street. There were very few shops on the east side, it was mostly taken up with the market.

It was right down opposite the shops was it at that stage?

Yes, it went from Clow Street down to past the end of Scott Street.

Oh yes, I see. Right through there. Down that side too there would be the post office - it was built fairly early wasn't it?

The post office has always been in the same position as it is today. Along, around the side of the shops on the east side, that was taken up by stall holders, vegetable growers, lolly vendors, clothing, and so on....

I didn't realise that they actually came into the street...

That would have been a lot more, oh, sort of friendly in a way wouldn't it...

Oh yes, everybody knew everybody. Not like today. If I go down the main street today, I'm very fortunate if I know from one to three people.

Good heavens....the people who came in to sell their vegetables and things would have been local farmers would they?

Growers, yes....

Not professional marketeers like you have these days.

No, they were all growers. They produced the vegetable and brought them in to sell at the market.

You were often down there to see the market?

Oh, every Tuesday, yes.

What was it like as a kid at home. Were you brought up much the same way as kids are these days?

I think we were brought up more that we had to do something around the house, and to help in the home.

What did you have to do?

Well, my salary was a penny a week for getting the morning wood and running the messages. If I failed to do one or the other...

Without complaint..... (laugh)...

.... the salary was cut out.

Actually, a penny a week was probably fairly generous in those days. Well, when it was raised to 3d a week I would have called the king my uncle! I felt that flush!

And what did you do with your pocket money?

Well, for the penny I used to go on the way back to school through the market and buy a penny's worth of honeycomb.

How much did you get?

Oh, a large bag.

What on earth did you do with it all?

It was eaten by the time I got to school..... (laughter).....

Which school did you go to?

East school, Foster Street, 1403. That was the only school here in those days. There were no other schools, no high schools, no technical schools.

Do you remember your first day at school?

Yes. I remember my first day at school. My cousins took me to school, two of them older than I was, and they took me to school, and then for some reason they didn't wait to bring me home, so I had to find my own way home as best I could.

Another school friend living in the same street brought me home, so everything was alright.

Were you almost in tears?

No, I wasn't in tears, but I thought it seemed a long way.

Now it would seem absolutely no distance - what is it, about half a mile?

Yes, about half a mile.

What was the school building like then?

Practically the same as it is today. The old original part, which was a brick building.

What about your teachers, or your lessons, do you remember anything about those, your teachers?

Oh yes, yes, I had good teachers. I remember my first teacher... I don't know what they called them - the babies then - was a Miss Rabout, she was a very good teacher.

Why do you think she was good?

Well, she always seemed kind. If you were in trouble, she was always there to help you out. The other teachers were good, there was a Miss ? two Miss Austins, they were sisters.

There were two Miss Austins were there? That probably accounts for why I hear so much of Miss Austin...

One Miss Austin is still alive. She must be very near 90

She is in her 90s. She is still alive is she? Because John Hunt contacted her, and she sort of said "I'd like to, but I'm not in very good health", but that was 3 years ago, and I was wondering....

As far as I know she's still alive.

But so many people seemed to have been taught by her. She's really an institution isn't she?

Yes, yes. Strict but kind, yes. She was a good teacher.

Do you remember any teachers that you didn't like?

No, I seem to have got on well with all the teachers. I never had any trouble. I know some of the other \_\_\_\_\_ used to fall foul of the teachers, but I never had any trouble.

What about your lessons?

Well, I wouldn't say I was perfect, and I wasn't dull, I was sort of the happy medium. I had no problems with learning, and I had no problems with doing my work.

Do you remember any of the sort of lessons you used to do, the teaching must have been different to what it is now.

Yes... I suppose some of the boys today wouldn't like to hear this, but we used to do darning, and sewing... that's why I'm never stuck if I have to put on a button for myself (laugh....)

Oh, that's great! This was with the sewing mistress one afternoon a week?

Yes. We used to have a pattern with a design of fruit drawn on a piece of paper, and then you had to do this pattern with wool to form the fruit.

We did that when I was at school! I remember that thing....

Spelling, dictation?

Yes, we had spelling. We used to do spelling in class, they used to write the spelling on the board, and you had to write it down, and then they'd give you a mental test with spelling. "You spell so and so,". I think we were taught more how to spell in those days than the children are today.

Yes, I think so.

Same with arithmetic. I'd never hear today of children at school doing what we used to call 'long cots'. The teacher used to write a great long list of a number of figures on the board and he'd point out someone and say, "Add it up."

Mental on the spot?

You had to stand up and add it up, looking at the board. If you got it right, very good, if you got it wrong, you got a severe reprimand. Then a very

great performance of the headmaster. He used to go round and visit various classes at various times in the morning and he was a great one on mental arithmetic, and he used to put two numbers down on the board and you had to add it up, and he used to say, "10 and 20, 14 and 16", so on and so on... but I don't know whether they do that in school today, I don't think the mental arithmetic is taught too much...

Mmmmm.... Do you remember how you used to amuse yourselves, playtimes and at lunch time..

Yes. We used to play all sorts of games... we used to play some games where we used to line up in two lines, and we used to have what we called crows and cranes - did you ever play that?

Oh, probably it was battleships and cruisers, probably much the same sort of thing..

Something similar. One boy.... sometimes some of the masters... one boy would call out "Crows" the crows had to chase the cranes, or the cranes chased the crows. Just getting caught out until there was none left. We used to play other games.... perhaps ball games, we used to usually have a football, and in cricket time we used to have a game of cricket. The only thing, we had to get out on the side street. We had to get out on the New Street footpath to play cricket.

Why?

Well, the masters wouldn't allow us to play in the school because it was too dangerous for other children who perhaps would get hit with the ball. Then there was.... people used to live opposite the school, and of course the ball used to always be going over their fence... and they'd get a bit annoyed!

You must have been at primary school when the first war was on.

Do you remember that making any difference to school or to the town?

Yes, it made quite a lot of difference. We used to have collections for the Red Cross. There were no comforts funds in that war, only Red Cross. Then they used to run collection days on Tuesdays. We used to have what they called

the flower day. We used to make up bouquets of flowers and sell them to people in the street, and round the market.

This was all organised through the school?

All organised through the school. Once I was detailed to go with others down to the railway station where we used to meet people going on the trains, and meet people coming off the trains. Of course there wasn't the <sup>rail</sup> / transport here that there is today. Only trains or people's own vehicle transport.

Did it mean that you got more women teachers because some of the men went off to war. Did it make any difference like that, or do you think there were problems with children with parents away.

Perhaps you were a bit too young to have noticed.....

No, there didn't seem to be any problems, not in those days, not with either teachers or parents... the fathers went to the war and mothers just seemed to carry on as usual. Of course I wasn't very old...

No, I was just thinking that was a bit much to ask of a six year old, or eight or ten year old to think about that. What about after school or weekends, what did a young lad do....

Well, after school, if there was any time left after you did your chores, well, you'd usually perhaps go to a school mate's place and have a game with them, or sometimes we used to have a bit of a game at night. We used to go out and have what they used to call a bit of a play of tallyho, you know, one or two fellas would hide, and the rest would all go round and try to find them.

In the half dark on a summer night.... yes, lovely...

Yes. Just below here there was a house that had a big cypress hedge, and for a long time the others never thought to look up on the top of this hedge. And two of us used to hide on the top of this hedge. We'd climb up over the fence alongside, hide up and lay flat on top of this cypress hedge...

Marvellous springs for that sort of thing aren't they?

Until somebody found out.... At weekends our rendezvous used to be mainly out to what was the Police Paddocks. Its now Churchill Park.

What were they like then?

Well, it was all bush, other than the homestead and buildings where they used to have the black trackers.

They were still there when you were....

They were there, yes.

What do you remember about them?

Well, there used to be sometimes perhaps 4, perhaps 5 of us used to go as a team out there. We usually had a couple of dogs.

Walk or ride?

Walk! Later on in life, perhaps a bit later on than this, we used to sort of half ride and half walk because the Serl boys, who's father was a coach builder, he bought them a little pony and built them a little cart, and they used to drive around in this little pony and cart. Sometimes we used to take it in turns, perhaps three would walk and two would ride, or it was too heavy on the little pony! When we used to get out there, it was either bird nesting or chasing possums,... in the blackberry season, gathering blackberries, but we used to endeavour to get up near the homestead to have a talk with the black trackers, and they used to show us how to throw boomerangs and spears, and make spears - not boomerangs. And they also used to show us how to catch snakes. They used to get a forked stick - teetree stick with a fork. They used to point the two forks, and they'd walk alongside the snake and they'd put that over his head and pin him down. Of course he used to do all the wriggling and what have you, but he couldn't get away.

Why did they want to catch them alive?

Well I don't know that they ever wanted to do anything. The only thing they used to do then - have you ever seen anybody kill a snake by cracking its back?

Like cracking a whip?

Yes.

I've heard of it, but I've never seen it, no.

Well, that's what they used to do. He'd hold the stick with one hand, he'd hold the snake's tail with the other, release the stick and just go .... and crack its

back. Now, I've never seen that done since I was a boy until we went for a holiday in 1969 when I retired from work, in Western Australia. We went over through the Nullabor... coming back a council truck passed us on the road, I think it was part of South Australia,. We were in the bus, and we saw this truck pull up, a chap jumped out, he went into the middle of the road and he picked up this snake by the tail and cracked its back. And I said to my wife, "I've never seen that done since I was a boy" (laugh), with the black trackers.

I don't think I'd like to try it somehow! I think I'd rather have a nice big long bamboo so I could get well back from them.

That's what they used to do. And of course they used to train the horses there. They used to break them in for the police.

Yes. This was in the days...

Well, this was before Mr. Downs, that I'm speaking of, this was a man named Faulkner. The first man... then a man named Downs came there, and I think the last man there was Mr. Haygarth. That was before they shifted over to Bundoora.

It sounds as if you had quite a lot of freedom to come and go as you liked, to roam around. There was no worries about you roaming.

No worries, no troubles. YOU could come and go in people's places. everybody knew everybody, we never did anything wrong. We didn't steal, we didn't break things down. If you opened a gate to go in you shut that gate to make sure you'd always be allowed back another time. Otherwise, if you let the stock out that was the end of you. I'll retrack going back to the Police Paddocks

a little while. To go to the Police Paddocks we could get in bush... up towards Herbert Street in Dandenong, go through bush over towards Stud Road, we had to dodge my uncle's brick yard because you couldn't go in there for dogs, because I got roared up once when the dogs run over the wet bricks. Then we'd go down through more bush down the back of the brick yards, and then we'd come to a clearance at the corner of Heatherton Road and the creek. Well now, to get into the Police Paddocks you either had to go on one side or the other of the creek. On one side was people named Ring who lived there,

and they always had a ferocious bull. So you had to watch where this bull was and if the bull was near the creek, you had to go over on the other side of the creek. The other side of the creek was property owned by, he was a retired sea captain, a Captain Camans(?), and he had a man who was an overseer of the property, and he didn't like boys going through there with dogs because they used to disturb his sheep. So if Ring's bull was near the creek, you had to run the gauntlet....of the man, and stir up the sheep (laughter)....

Which sort of all added to the adventure of it, didn't it?

Now, you said a little while ago, that in later life you were a Sunday school teacher. I assume your connection with the church was right from the very beginning. You went to Sunday school?

I started Sunday school when I was 5 years of age.

Yes, and how did that differ from school - in the feel of it?

Oh, well, it was different. When the Sunday school first started over here, you were all just in one big class. There was no distinction between ages, until you come to a short lesson at the end, and you were just divided up and sat in the seats with a teacher on a chair in between two rows of seats. I grew up then right through the Sunday school until I was about 17 I think, then I was pooled in as a teacher myself.

How much of your, sort of family.... I'll call it social life... social life revolved around the church?

Oh, most social life, because the .... we used to have a monthly social, then of course there was church on Sunday, there was Sunday school, church perhaps in the morning, perhaps at night, and any functions we used to hold - picnics, and get togethers and visit people's homes for different functions and parties. Practically all revolved around church life.

And this would probably also add to your sense of community. The people you went to school with were the people you did everything with, in effect. Was there a particularly large methodist community here?

I get the feeling that there was.

Yes. We used to have a Sunday school with about 100 to 150-200 sometimes.

Were the other denominations equally strong? I was beginning to think

it was sheer coincidence, that everyone I've spoken to is Methodist.

No... Methodist was the strongest congregation, and the strongest Sunday school and the strongest choir.

Oh... can you think of any reason why Methodists seem to congregate here?

I can't. I don't know why. Its always seemed to be a very strong following really, right from the time I can remember. Some of the leading citizens were Methodist. A Mr. Renfrey here was one of the early general store owners, was a strong methodist. I think the man before him, a Mr. Ruddick, was a strong Methodist. The Cadle family were strong methodists...

.... and the teachers?

No, teachers were Church of England.

you sang in the choir by the sound of it...

No, I didn't sing in the choir. I did everything but sing in the choir!

Sunday school picnics..... in the early days....

Yes, we always had a Sunday school picnic. Every year we had a Sunday school picnic. We always had a picnic every Cup Day..

Where did you go?

Oh... sometimes to the beach. We went anywhere from Mordialloc to Frankston, and sometimes we went to the Hills. We went to Ferntree Gully...

Emerald Lake?

No, we never got as far as Emerald Lake, not in my day. I knew it was there because I used to go and visit my uncle and aunt who used to live at Emerald and Gembrook. When I was a boy we used to go up there, and I used to try and race the puffing billy in those days along the railway line. I used to ride a pony all round the hills there, in those days. Now I go up there and I can't even find my way about, now its all cleared and built on. I can only find one house where they lived.

What about holidays, Christmas holidays, did the family go off on a holiday?

No, no.... we very rarely went away far. We used to go away more at Easter time. We used to go up to Gembrook, Emerald, as I've been speaking of, or another aunt at Greensborough. We used to go out there for a holiday. We never went away at Christmas. The only time we used to get away was perhaps Boxing Day or New Year's day to Mordialloc, the beach.

Did you used to help your father? Did you go out with him when he was building? Was that fun or hard work?

Yes.... oh no, it used to be fun because I think my father always treated me as an equal. He never said you've gotta do this, you've gotta do that. "Now, you help me do this, I'll see if we can help you do something else", you know. Always treated as equals, we were more friends than we were, you know, father and son.

Perhaps one of the reasons why you went into building yourself, you had a good introduction to it.

Oh, he tried to talk me into other things. He tried to talk me into being a school teacher, he tried to talk me into an office job, and I said no, I'm going outside in the fresh air!

You stayed at school until sixth grade or eighth grade?

I stayed there until the high school started. The high school started here in 1919 after the First World War. I was one of the first pupils.

That would mean you started the same year as Jean Cusson?

That's right. Jean and I were in the same class. There was no school built at that time then, we started here in the old Fire Brigade Hall, the Temperance Hall and the Church of Christ Hall. That was our school. It was nearly two years I suppose before the other school was built. Our play spot in those days is Mason Street now, which was unmade. That's where we used to play football and cricket and what have you...

What did you do? Did you sort of trip from one to the other, or did you have the Fire Brigade on certain days.....

No, certain classes were allotted into certain buildings. I started off I think in the Fire Brigade, then I was in the Temperance Hall. I was never over in the Church of Christ building. Then I just started up in the new building just after it was opened, then the year after I started work.

So you had two, three years at high school. Did that leave any different sort of.... primary school had obviously been a pretty good place - high school the same?

Oh yes, high school was the same. We had very good teachers. Mr. Langford was the first head master. He was a very good teacher, he was a returned man from the first war. We had Mr. Brooks and Mr. Gibbs, I think they were returned men too. A Mr. Stevenson I think was the other man. We had a Miss she was the senior teacher.

None of them sort of stand out as being particularly good, or particularly..... you didn't like?

Oh no, I never had any faults with.... Miss Kirkham, she was the French teacher, she was very good. The only one I perhaps didn't see eye to eye with, I couldn't push this French into the back of my old skull...! and I'm afraid I didn't get a very good mark in that respect. No, I always got on very well with the teachers, never had any troubles or complaints at all.

Now, you said that you wanted to work in the fresh air, was there anything .... what really decided you wanted to build, and despite other people's pressures, not doing these other things.

I think one of the main things was to be with my father. He always liked the building, and I seemed to like it, and I think that was the main reason.

Did you start off as virtually the messenger boy, or had you picked up enough skills.....

No, I started off as the messenger boy - 7/6d a week.

What did you do with that 7/6d?

Oh, I don't know. I suppose I spent it on a few things, perhaps on lollies and what have you's.

But your parents supplied you with your clothes, and you didn't have to pay board or anything....

No, I didn't pay any board.....

So that 7/6d would have gone quite a long way then?

Yes.

In your early days in the job, what did you have to do?

Well. Mainly you had to get the tools out, pick up the tools when the men had finished. Run the messages, gather up all the scraps laying about from under the men's feet. Put the billy on, the billy was always put on about a quarter to twelve. I had to see that the billy was put on and boiled. I think that was the main thing most of the time.

And how long was it until you started doing actual building?

Oh, I suppose you might say I was apprenticed for about 12 months till I gathered enough know how to be able to carry on and work with the men.

You were formally apprenticed?

Yes...

...and were they good at... was there someone who actually sort of spent some time with you each day actually teaching you, or did you just pick up the knowledge?

Oh no, they used to teach you as you went on, as you were doing the job... they used to say, "Now you do this this way, this is how you do this" and they explained why they did these things, and how they did it, and that's how you learnt.

Do you think that's a better system than the apprenticeships today?

Well, I don't know how they work today, I haven't been .....

I think there's a lot more theoretical work, and less practical work...

There's a lot of theory. Well now, the theory is really no good without your practice. May I digress here?

Yes, certainly....

In my later life I became a building inspector for the city of Springvale.

I was there for 13 years. Now they put on a young lad down there - he was a very smart boy, very good at theory, but he used to say to me as I went round on the jobs, I used to take him round to try and teach him what he was expected to do. And he used to say to me, "Look, I could not do what you do". He said,

"A man comes to you, and he says, now you've asked me to do a certain thing, If I do so and so, will that be equal to what you've asked me to do?" You either say "Yes" or "No", now he said, "I could not do that because I've not had practical experience, and I wouldn't know whether one was equal to the other". And said, "What am I going to do?" And I said, "Well, your only chance if you want to learn is to get weekend experience on practical instruction". "Other than that, I don't know how you're going to work it. Because the only other way is to try and manufacture something in your own back yard and get a builder in there to advise you and help you and show you what to do".

So the best training is the two running parallel? You must have them both together. You can't have one without the other. I think its unfortunate today that there's too many theory men and not enough practical men. Now I know this applies in this building inspecting. There are too many lads... I'm not saying they're not good, but as far as their practical experience, its almost null and void. Reading it out of a book and putting it into practice is vastly different.

Now, going back to when you were apprenticed, where were you building and what were you building at the time?

Oh, mostly in Dandenong. Dandenong and outlying areas. I think the furthest I travelled with my father to build would be to , oh, Malvern, Glen Huntly, Pakenham...

...and this was houses mainly?

Mainly houses. Some shops...

and mostly timber?

Timber and brick. At that time of course there was no such thing... it came in later... brick veneer was unheard of. It was either solid brick or timber.

Now, the schooling that you had, do you think that in any way helped you when you started as a builder? (Yes) How?

Well, you see education at the high school and your state school, you got a good grounding in arithmetic. At the high school you got a good grounding in

geometry, trigonometry, and they all helped in building construction. I practically taught myself on plan drawing.

Mmm... there wouldn't have been any of that in the schools would there?  
No. The nearest you could go then was what used to be called then the working men's college.

That was in the city wasn't it?  
Where the RMIT is now. Swinburne I think started.. it could have been going, but there was no school at Caulfield or anywhere near like that at all.

So you were about 16, 17, 18 now?  
I would be about 16 or 17 I suppose when I finished school and went to work.

Did Dandenong change much during that period?  
No, not so much. Dandenong really didn't change until after the second war, not that you would say was a major change.

Well, apart from the fact that you were working instead of being at school, did your way of life change much as you grew through your teenage years? Were your amusements in your social life centred round the same sort of thing?

Practically centred round the same thing. Might have gone out more as you grew older... local dances, and we used to go to the city to theatres and the pictures. I suppose the main grounding was there and you didn't depart very far from it.

You started working with your father most of the time, or did you branch out from him....

No, I stayed with my father all the time until he died and then I more or less carried on. I had been working on my home, like with him just advising me, on the construction part, as the part of contracting, in case the young fellow forgot something, or left something out, you know...

When were you married?

In 1935.

Now, you brought your own children up in Dandenong...

No children...

You haven't had any? (No). Well, you've obviously got nephews and nieces.... do you think the place has been good for them, as it was for you? Well, in some respects its better, there is more advantage with the working facilities, there are more factories, there are more places of employment. You see in my young days you either had to work for someone building and contracting or plumbing, the only two places where you could get employment as far as factories were concerned was over at the brickworks or the bacon factory.

And you probably wouldn't have wanted to work at the brick factory with uncle.... and you probably wouldn't have wanted to work in the bacon factory either!!

That's right!

As a builder over 30, 40, 50 years?

Yes, I had over 30 years on the building before I was semi-retired and went for a job as an inspector.

What was the building trade like in Dandenong over that time?

There must have been ups and downs....

Oh yes, there were ups and downs. Well of course in the ... between war periods it was very good, there was ample work. We hardly had to look for work because people would be chasing you to come and work for them, build houses, sheds and other things - shops and so on. Then of course we got into the depression stage, oh, 29,30's when the depression was on and you could not get a job. You'd walk the soles off your boots looking for a job.

Now this affected established builders?

It affected everybody.

How in particular did it affect your business?

Well, it affected us this way, that you couldn't get a job as far as building was concerned, you had to take anything that came along. I know my father and I went out on to farms doing fencing round farms, farmers, doing alterations to cow sheds, dairies, hay sheds, anything you could get.

This would probably mean that not only did you gradually run right out of work, but some of the buildings and so on that you were finishing off were never paid for.

Well, father was pretty lucky there. I don't think he had many bad debts. I think I collected them all when I was on my game, than he did!

How did the depression affect you in general?

Ah well, it affected it this way, shopkeepers had a very hard time because people couldn't pay for their goods. My mother had some property that she had let that she couldn't get rent from, she had to let the people live there, pay what they could, when they could, if they could. There was only the drastic people who put people out of homes and that sort of thing, and then they couldn't do any good because they put them out, they couldn't sell them, they could do nothing about it.

I had the feeling that Dandenong, you know, everybody knew everybody and everyone sort of worked together, how did the depression affect this, did people stand behind each other, or become ....

I think they mostly stood on their own two feet. The only time perhaps that people more or less stuck together was perhaps through relationships. If a relation was sort of down and out I think the rest of the family came and helped them a bit. Other than that I think most people sort of battled on their own as best they could.

So you managed to keep your home property, whatever, and just had enough to live? And that would have been for how long? Oh, well it was on.... '29 I think it started until about '33...

..and then there was a minor pick up and then the war? So that really you had 10, 12 years of not terribly good conditions.

That's right - not really good. I suppose that affected me a bit, a bit late in life getting married, but there you are you had to gather some funds first. One of the first places we built then after the depression in about 1934, it'll show you the difference in the price of houses now, we built a two storey brick house then, solid brick, 1500 pounds. How would you like one today?

Thank you!

you could get bricks less than 3 pound a thousand delivered wherever you wanted them.

What did the war do to the town?

Aw well, the second war of course played a bit of havoc with the town.

In what way?

Well of course a lot of the younger men enlisted.

Proportionally more than the first war?

Oh yes, oh definitely yes.

Now I understand from one of the other people I was talking to that there was really quite an influx of people to the area with a lot of troops stationed around the area, and that because of this some businesses, such as the bacon factory did quite well throughout those years. How did it affect you?

Well it affected me in this way, that there was no work of course, the building practically closed down you see. You either had to be ....

....a supply industry?

.....or, free of conscription, or enlisting, or anything like that you see.

Now, the brickworks was an item like that - they were free because they were manufacturing goods that were being used for the army.

Were they manufacturing things other than bricks?

No, but you had to manufacture bricks to keep industry going - foundries, you see, these fire bricks were used in foundries.

Oh, firebricks as opposed to house bricks, I see.....

They were used in engines, all those sorts of things. Well that was a protected industry, that's the word I was trying to think of, and of course the bacon factory that was food manufacture and that was protected too. Everything else was out, and I think most of the chaps who didn't enlist were taken off in the army service. I was in the army service business....

Doing what?

On building for the army. I don't think there were any others....

Locally?

Oh no, we were sent around. I started off first with building big stores, we were building stores at Braybrook. I was there for some time, then we were

taken down to Geelong. I finished up at Geelong - I was headed for Darwin. Then this contractor got some more work locally, and I was taken with him again, otherwise I would have been at Darwin when it was blown up. They wouldn't take me in the army because I'm a ?

How did that happen?

I was born with it really...

So that throughout those years.... It hasn't affected your building trade though....

No.

Throughout those years then, although your own business was in the doldrums, you were more secure than during the depression years because you had a regular wage, and perhaps managed to have some things.... a little bit better to cope with the boom when it came in the 'fifties.

Yes. You see the boom didn't really come here until after the second war, on the buildings and industry. The first industry that came here was International. They came here because after the war when everything was progressing and there was a shortage of power on the other side of the city, they came here to Dandenong to be on the receiving end before the power got to the city.

Was this all too part of an after war decentralisation thing?

Yes... Then after that, of course, Heinz came, GMH, and all the others here have all followed

Now did you get work on the construction of these, or on the houses for the workers?

I did construction for some of the workers. I didn't get involved in any of the big construction, because you either had to have a lot of employees, and the more employees you had the more trouble you had...

And you always preferred to work much on your own...

I found that if I had anything up to about ten men working I could supervise the work and make money. When I got over that you found that you employed

some fellows who didn't want to work, or as little as they could, and you found that you went down....

With a team of what you say, five to ten, how many sort of jobs could you work at the same time?

Oh well, in those days you had to work anything from three to four jobs because you had trouble with supplies. While you were working on one job, you were building up supplies on the others, so that you could move from one to the other, and so it went on. Then you'd have to have jobs in various stages you'd have to have jobs under the frame construction, and you'd perhaps have another one where you had the frame up and bricklayers were working on it, and you had another one where it was being enclosed and you had it in the finishing stages, and so on.

So you were involved in the expansion out around Doveton?

I was not in the Doveton area, no. My expansion more was down South and round the Keysborough area, the Noble Park area.

Oh yes, that's right, Noble Park went in about then, didn't it..

all those weatherboard.... Now after the big businesses began to move in, how did that affect the town? Up until then it had really been a sort of country market town, hadn't it?

Yes... well, from then of course there was a vast number of people came here. The town started to expand, more shops were built, offices, all sorts of other types of buildings to what we had. More manufacturers and small business people.

How did the feel of the town.... did that change?

It developed from a friendly community to a community of hustle and bustle.

A bit hard to cope with?

Well, hard to cope with, with anyone who'd lived here from their boyhood days to their old age! We learned that we'd come from a small country town to a city where everybody was in a hurry, and nobody knew anybody, nobody had time to talk to anybody and it seemed a vast change from a quiet locality to hustle and bustle.

This would, you know, affect you in personal things like you'd go to a shop and people wouldn't know you, and in business where before I suppose you more or less knew all your potential clients, what their backgrounds were and what their finances were, to a much more dicey situation where you weren't quite sure who you were dealing with.. You had to be more cautious then. But of course, since the latter days mainly, you see I haven't been in the building business, when I got to the stage when I saw it was giving out, and I thought well plans and prices and quotes and figures, so I applied for this job when Springvale divided from Dandenong and I went there as an inspector.

And what did that involve?

Oh well it involved a certain amount of more figure work and inspections, but no problems and complications as far as contracting was concerned. In the early stages, the early years, if you went down the main street of Dandenong on a Saturday morning, it'd take you all your time to get any business done because you'd meet that many people you knew, and they'd all want to talk to you, that you had to almost offend some people to get about your business. Nowadays, you go down the street and if you meet one to three people you know, you think you've done a marvellous days work! Other than the people in the shops...

Yes.... I know...Over that period of time, you know the community

thing, quite a lot of ups and downs, what's the present situation like?

Oh, I think the present situation seems quite alright. They might be having a little bit of a hard time , but its nowhere in comparison to the depression.

You hear in some of the newspapers that Dandenong's one of the places with high unemployment. Is there much evidence of this around?

No, no. You hardly see anybody. If you go down the street you don't see anybody loitering about, you don't see anybody as though they are hard up, their clothes are almost falling off them, like a lot of people were in the depression days. They had nothing even to buy food. Nowadays, they can get subsistence to buy food. There's not the amount of want that there was in the Depression.

You were very happy growing up here, do you think the community's as good a place to bring up young children?

Well, in some respects no. More pitfalls and places to lead young people astray today than there was in my day. We had very little distraction from leading anyone astray than what they have today.

You are thinking of the pinball machines down in Thomas Street and things like that? Do you see the kids spending an awful lot of time in there?

Yes. There's too many young people go in there that shouldn't go in there at all.

I know that was one of the places we always used to look if any of our kids were absent from school....! There's been a lot of changes in Dandenong over that time, which period did you feel the town changed the most and became different than the town you were brought up in?

Oh, I would think the time when the big industries started to move in here. The town seemed to change very rapidly. A vast number of people came to live here, and the town seemed to change very much as far as population...

Did the old established town people want this, or was this change just something that just happened without much local people's say?

I don't think they had much say about it. I don't think even the old people of the town got any benefits from it whatsoever. It was practically all outside people who more or less made the change.... and they got the benefits from it....

....not even the Chamber of Commerce....

I don't think so...

....actually the first one was over the border in the Berwick shire wasn't it?

Well you see the main ones are really all over the border in Berwick shire.

The council had a vote here about changing the boundaries which was just after the main industries came here, and to my mind the council had a really good

case if they'd have forced the issue at the time. When the industries came here they had no facilities, the shire of Berwick wouldn't put in any facilities for them because they had no ways and means of putting in facilities such as sewerage and water and telephones....

Because that was just a small rural council, wasn't it, Berwick, at that stage. No income.....

They hadn't progressed like Dandenong. You see they were still in the country state. Anyway, when it came to a vote, instead of the Dandenong Council saying well, if you want these facilities you go to Berwick, we won't give them to you, or can't give them to you, you go and get them off Berwick, these people would have fought Berwick to have the boundaries changed to come into Dandenong, but instead of that the Dandenong Council said, oh yes, we'll help you, we'll give you all the facilities, and then when they turned round... you see they found that if they'd come in with Dandenong, their rents would have been higher than they are at Berwick, so they said no, we'll stay with Berwick.

So Dandenong bore the brunt of supplying the ancillary....

.....they supplied all the goods and nothing for it...

.... they don't get any rates or anything from them?

No....