

THE ORDISH FAMILY had early links with Dandenong, going back some 125 years.

JACK ORDISH, of 44 Scott St., Dandenong, who has lived the whole of his 82 years in that street, told me that his grandfather and grandmother, Thomas and Mary Ordish, came out from England on the "Titan", arriving in Melbourne on 1st. September, 1857. Thomas was the son of a Derbyshire farmer, and was born there in February, 1827, and died at Dandenong on 11th. August 1880 when only 53.

When he arrived in Melbourne, 30-year-old Thomas joined the Police Force and was sent to ~~Macclesford, near Castlemaine~~ Bendigo but for reasons given later, he and his wife did not remain there for long before coming to Dandenong, where they bought land on the Dandenong Creek flats at South Dandenong, near where Ordish Rd., (named after them) is located today. However they did not live there, but in a house near where McCahon's Timber Yards used to be in Foster St. on the way to the station. There they had a family of six sons and three daughters: Edward (who died at 4 months), Sarah, Eliza, Rowland, John Whiting, William Pearsall, Edgar, Bertha and Mary (who died when only 10mths. old)

EDGAR, Jack's father was born on 16th. June, 1870, and died when 65 on 11th. May, 1936. He married Lillian Anderson, and Jack was their only child.

see family tree

In 1935 Jack was to marry Dandenong girl, Myra Vizard, whose people had a small property in Cleeland St. about opposite the present shopping cluster up near the Technical School. Their home is no longer there, having been destroyed by fire.

Jack was born in his parents' home, 42 Scott St. built about by his father. In those days a midwife came to the home for births. That home is still owned by Jack, who lives in the house next door, 44 Scott St., which he himself built under his father's guidance, for his bride. Both he and Myra attended Dandenong State School 1403 in Foster St., and later the Dandenong High School. They were married in the Methodist Church, Dandenong, 51 years ago.

After leaving school, Jack went to work with his builder father, and learned the carpentering trade. His dad also had a timber yard in Langhorne St., almost behind the Town Hall. Jack continued working with his father until he died in May, 1936, and then carried on the business as a builder himself.

There was no lack of Ordish's around Dandenong, as Edgar's four brothers, Rowland, Jack, William and Harold, and his two married sisters, Mrs. Tom Kirkham (SARAH) and Mrs. Youle (Elizabeth) also lived in the district.

William founded and conducted the successful Ordish Fire Brick Co. in Stud Road in the 1890's and for years he and his wife lived in a home at the corner of Stud Rd. and David St. (The story of the Ordish Brickworks is told elsewhere).

Rowland lived in Macpherson St. (a photo of his old home is in the Society's album). He owned all the land from Besly St. to Power St., on the east side of Macpherson St. From there he conducted a cartage business with his horses and drays.

Jack, ^{who was also a builder,} and Edger were associated in the timber yards behind the Town Hall until Jack went to the 1914-18 World War. He & his wife and family lived on the Highway about where the new VACC building is today. There were two daughters - Mrs Myrtle Collins & Mrs Albert Crump. A son passed away when a boy.

Harold went to the Boer War with the first contingent of the Mounted Rifles. He came home from the war once & then went over again with the last contingent. He later became a member of the Permanent Army, after visiting England in Jan, 1911, to study at Military colleges at Aldershot, Chatham & other places, in order to qualify as an officer.

Jan 19 To prevent shortages

ORDISH 2.

Among houses built by his father, still standing today despite the inroads of developers, are: "Thrimby", the former Abbott's home in Mason St. (now a Private Nursing Home), Twiss's former home on the corner of Walker and McCrae Streets. (this was being built when Jack was attending the Foster St. school), "Thuruna", the Cadle's old home in Clow St. (now "The Home For The Aged") and a home at the corner of Pickett and Hutton streets. There are many more, of course. About 1910 Edgar Ordish built the State Savings Bank in Lonsdale St. and he always lamented the fact that when it was added to in order to bring it out to the street level, the old Gothic windows gracing its front were scrapped.

For the past 82 years Jack has only ever resided in Scott St. -- at first as a boy in the family home at 42 Scott St. and for the rest of the time at 44 Scott St. where he and Myra reside today.

Over his many years in Dandenong Jack erected hundreds of buildings in and around Dandenong before accepting the post of Building Inspector with the newly created Springvale Municipality.

Asked about his boyhood days, Jack said that among his mates were the Searle brothers, Alan, Fred and Noel, Stan Pickett and Les Adlam. (Alan, Noel and Stan have all passed on). He recalled that he and his mates used to catch leeches in the old water-hole across the road from the Ordish Brickyard, and used to receive a penny a dozen for them from the son of Mr. Sutherland, who was studying medicine. They also received a penny each from the same source for frogs which they caught in a waterhole on the Sutherland's own property, "Novar".

Further insight into the Ordish family background, and Jack's own recollections, especially of his youthful days in growing up in Dandenong, is garnered from an interview which Marian Amies, of the Monash University, had with Jack in 1979. These are some extracts taken from that interview:

"Grandfather came out here to take up land, but for a time he took on a job as police constable when the gold rush was on. He was sent to Bendigo with the idea of cleaning up the sly grog shanties around the diggings. When he arrived he found that these were occupied by women and children while their husbands were away looking 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 further instructions. The word he got back was that he had received his instructions and to carry them out. ~~Some~~ ^{She} resigned on the spot. For a time they took up residence at Muckleford, near Castlemaine but remained only a short time before coming to Dandenong to take up land at South Dandenong --agriculture and pig-raising I think. Nearby Ordish Rd. was named after them. This was before there was any family. It was on the property in Foster St. that they were born.

My father Edgar, one of the sons, was a builder and during the crash, when work was scarce, he and a mate, ^{Bill Orgill} went over to South Africa at a time when the diamond mines were going. They worked at Jagers, but came back to Australia just before the Boer War started. One of my uncles went back to fight in the Boer War, but not my father. The only time he was out of the building trade was during the first world war. . . . I was born at Dandenong in the house next door (42 Scott St.) and I have lived all my life in that house and this one (44 Scott St.) which I built with my father's help.

One of my earliest memories of Dandenong when a child was being taken by my father to my uncle's brickworks in Stud Rd. I would have been about four. The works then were on a much smaller scale and they had the old beehive kilns, fired by local wood. . . I remember, too, going shopping with my mother. The town then comprised mostly small shops and there were vacant lots in the section of Lonsdale St. from Scott St. to Clow St. --some with fruit trees growing on them. Mainly the only two-storey buildings were the hotels. Most of the shopping area was on the west side of Lonsdale St. There were very few shops on the ^{east} ~~west~~ side, which was mainly taken up by the market which extended from Clow St. down to past the end of Scott St. entrance on the other side of the street. The stallholders

sold vegetables, groceries, lollies, ~~etc.~~, clothing etc.
. . . In those days everybody knew everybody -- not like today. . . As a kid I got a penny a week for getting the mornings wood and running the messages. If I failed to do one or the other the "salary" was cut out! Actually a penny a week was fairly generous in those days. When it was raised to 3d. a week I wouldn't have called the King my uncle! I felt that 'flush'! For the penny I received at first, on the way back to school through the market I would buy a large bag of honeycomb -- and that would be eaten before I got back to the Foster St. school -- the only school in the town in those days. I well remember my first day at that school; two cousins, older than I was, took me to school, but for some reason they didn't wait to take me home. However, another friend living in the same street brought me home. I thought it seemed a long way. Today the old original brick part of the school is much the same as it was in those days. My first teacher was a Miss Rabout -- a very good teacher. I also remember that there were two sisters teaching at 1403 -- Miss Austins. The last I heard of them, one was still alive and in her nineties. She was really an institution - strict but kind, and a good teacher. In those days even the boys were taught darning and sewing. So I'm never stuck if I have to put on a button myself!. We had spelling lessons *- I think we were taught more about spelling in those days than the children are today. The same with arithmetic. I never hear of the children of today having to do "long tots" -- ~~When~~ were figures written on the blackboard which the teacher would call on someone to add up mentally. If you got it wrong you were severely reprimanded. The headmaster used to come around and visit various classes of a morning, and he was a great one on mental arithmetic. He would write figures on the board and ask somebody to add them up. . . At playtime we would play what we called 'crows and cranes'. We would line up in two rows -- one of 'crows' and the other of 'cranes'. One boy, or one of the masters, would call out 'Crows' and the 'crows' would have to chase and catch the 'cranes', or vice versa, until there was none left. We used to have a football, too, and in the summer played cricket. For this we had to get out on the New St. footpath because it was too dangerous for the other children in the schoolground, and people used to live opposite the school

and they would get a bit annoyed when the ball went over their fences. . . During the first World War we used to have collections on Tuesdays for the Red Cross. There was no Comforts Fund for that war. On what they called Flower Days we used to make up bouquets of flowers and sell them to people in the street or around the market. Once I was sent with others to the railway station to meet the trains and sell them to the people coming off the trains. After school, if there was any time left after you did your chores, you might go to a school-mate's place to have a bit of a game, such as 'Tally Ho', on a summer's night-- one or two would hide and the rest would try and find them. Two of us used to hide on top of ^acypress hedge at a house down the street.

At week-ends our rendezvous used to be mainly out to what was the Police Paddocks. It was then all bush, other than the homestead and the buildings where they used to have the blacktrackers, who were still there then. Sometimes there would be a team of 4 Or 5 of us, and we would walk out. Later we used to half walk, half ride, because the Searle boys, whose father was a coach-builder, bought them a little pony and built them a small cart. They used to drive around in this, and sometimes when there ~~were~~ too many of us, three would ride and two walk, otherwise it was too heavy on the little pony. When we got out to the Police Paddocks, it was usually bird-nesting or chasing possums, or gathering blackberries in the blackberry season. We used to endeavour to get up near the homestead to have a talk with the black-trackers; they used to show us how to throw boomerangs and spears -- and to make spears, but not boomerangs. They also showed us how to catch snakes. They used to get a forked tea-tree stick and cut it to two points. Then they would locate a snake, walk alongside it and pin its head down with the fork; and wriggle as it might ~~be~~ it could not get away. Then, holding the stick in place with one hand, the tracker would grab its tail with the other, release the stick and just give the snake a sudden flick and break its back. I never saw that done again until after I retired, I went on a trip to W.A. in 1969. Coming back across the Nullabor, a council worker suddenly pulled up his truck, jumped out, grabbed a snake from the middle of the road by the tail and cracked its back with a whip-like flick. ¶

. . . Getting back to the blacktrackers: they used to break

the horses in for the Police. There was a chap named Faulkner^{ner} in charge, then Down and later Haygarth. That was before they shifted out to Bundoora. . . There was no worry at home about our roaming. You could come and go in people's places; everybody knew everybody, and we never did anything wrong. We didn't steal or break things down; if you opened a gate, you made sure you shut it so that you would be allowed back another time. If you didn't, and stock got out, that was the end of you! To get to the Police Paddocks we would go through the bush around Herbert St. and go toward Stud Road. We had to dodge uncle's brickyard because you couldn't go in there with dogs (I got roared up once because the dogs ran over the wet bricks!) We would go through more bush at the back of the brickyards until we came to a clearing at the corner of Heatherton Rd. and the Dandenong Creek. To reach the Police Paddocks you had to go either one side of the creek or the other. Rings lived on one side and they always had a ferocious bull. You had to watch where it was; if it was near the creek you had to go on the other side of the creek through a property owned by a retired sea captain, Captain ~~Command~~ ^{Boys} (C). His overseer didn't like ~~people~~ going through there with dogs because they disturbed the sheep. So if Ring's bull was near the creek you had to run the gauntlet of the man, and stir up the sheep.

When I was five I started Sunday School at the Dandenong Methodist Church and grew up right through the Sunday school until I was 17 when I was 'pooled in' as a Sunday school teacher myself. Most of my social life revolved around the Church. We used to have a monthly social church on a Sunday , sometimes in the morning, or perhaps at night, Sunday school, picnics, get-togethers, and visit people's homes for different functions and parties. There was a particularly strong Methodist community here. We used to have a Sunday school of 100 to 150-200 at times. There was always a strong Methodist following here; Mr. Renfree, a storekeeper, was a strong Methodist, as was Mr. Rudduck, the man before him. The Cadle family were also strong Methodists. But ~~Many~~ of the Sunday school teachers were Church of England. We always had a Sunday school picnic ~~on~~ every Cup Day --sometimes to the beach , anywhere from Mordialloc and Frankston, and sometimes to the hills at Ferntree Gully. When I used to visit my uncle and aunt at Emerald and Gembrook I used to try and race puffing

Billy along the railway line. In those days I used to ride a pony all around the hills. Now when so much of it is cleared and built on, I can't even find my way about. I can only find one house where I used to stay. The family never went for holidays at Christmas, apart from, perhaps on Boxing Day or New Year's Day -- more at Easter, and then never far away -- to Emerald, Gembrook, or Greensborough, where another aunt lived.

When I was young it was fun to go out with Dad to where he was building, because he always treated me as an equal; we were more like friends rather than father and son. I got to like building, and although Dad tried to talk me into being a teacher, or to take an office job, I said, "No, I'm going outside into the fresh air".

I stayed at school until the High School started here in 1919 after the first World War. I was one of the first pupils. Jean Abbott was another in the same class. There was no High School building then and school was started in the old Fire Brigade hall, the Temperance Hall and the Church of Christ Hall. Mason St. was unmade in those days and was a play spot for football, cricket etc. I attended the new High School building when it was opened, but the year after that I started work. We had good teachers at the High School in those early days -- headmaster Percy Langford, Mr. Brooks, Mr. Gibbs, and I think Mr. Stevenson, and Miss Kirkham.

My main reason for wanting to be a builder was to be with my father, and because I liked building. I started off as a messenger boy at 7/6 per week. I had been apprenticed almost 12 months before I gathered enough know-how to be able to work with the men. I think apprentices today have to do a lot more theoretical work and less practical work. But the theory is no good without the practical work. This was brought home to me in my later life during the 13 years I was building inspector with the City of Springvale, and a young lad was put on who was good on theory but lacked practical experience. It's unfortunate that today there are too many theory men and not enough practical men.

Most of the homes my father and I built were timber or ~~brick~~ solid brick, for brick-veneer was then unheard of.

Dandenong really didn't change much in a major sort of way until after the second World War. Present day young people have more opportunity of securing employment because there are so many more factories and other places of employment. In my

young days ~~young days~~ you either had to work with someone building or contracting, or plumbing, or at the only two factories in Dandenog then: the Ordish Brickworks or the Bacon Factory. After my father died I carried on the building business. I had over 30 years in the building trade before becoming a Building Inspector. In my building days the toughest days were in 1929 and the early thirties --the Depression. Because there was no building jobs then, my father and I went out and did fencing around farms, alterations to cow-sheds, dairies, hay-sheds etc. -- anything we could get. My father was lucky in not having many bad debts. I think I had more than he did. In the depression shopkeepers had a very hard time because people couldn't pay for their goods. My mother had some property let for which she couldn't collect the rent. She had to let the people go on living there, paying what they could, when they could, and if they could!. Only the very drastic people put people out of their homes; if they did, they couldn't sell them any way. Families stuck together, relations helped each other and people mostly stood on their own ^{two} feet and battled on as best they could. From 1929 to 1933 conditions were really bad. One of the first places we built after the depression, about 1934, was a two-storey solid brick home for £1500. ^{put on Chapel St, Keysborough (now Rob. Bowman's)} Compare that with today's prices! You could get bricks for less than £3 per 1000, delivered anywhere you wanted.

The second World War played a bit of a havoc with the town, with so many enlisting, or being taken ~~away~~ off in Army service. I was in the Army service, building for the Army -- they wouldn't take me for the Army. After that war Dandenong boomed as the big industries came here. More people came to live here. The town started to expand; more shops, offices and other types of buildings were erected. There were more manufacturers and small businesspeople and Dandenong developed from a quiet, friendly community into a place of hustle and bustle. For those who lived here all their life it was hard to cope with this change from a small country town to a city where everybody was in a hurry, nobody knew anybody and nobody had time to talk to anybody. In the ^{early} days, if you went down the street on a Saturday morning it would take you all your time to get any business done because you met so many people you knew and they'd all want to talk to you. Nowadays if you go down the main street and meet from one to three people you know, apart from people in the shops, you think you've done a marvellous days work.

So far as conditions in Dandenong today, people may be having a bit of a hard time, but there's no comparison with the Depression. In some respects the Dandenong of today holds more pitfalls for young people growing up, to go astray.

While most of the big industries are over the border in Berwick municipality, it was Dandenong that provided the facilities that attracted them here, and got nothing for it.