

A history of the Dandenong Stock Market site

The Dandenong Stock Market, a focus of activity in the Dandenong region for more than 130 years, contributed enormously to the region's growth, prosperity and character.

The market had its origins in an unofficial market operated by Thomas Rosling circa 1860. Several years' later residents agreed upon the need for a public market and a combined livestock and produce market was established in the centre of town. It opened officially on October 10, 1866 and was soon a weekly fixture. The frequency of the market, and its location at a road and rail junction between Melbourne and Gippsland contributed to its success.

Market day brought farmers and other producers, both small and large, together with their families, to Dandenong from the surrounding districts to buy, sell, shop, look around and meet up with friends and associates. Business in the town developed around the market - auctioneers, stock agents, hotels and small traders amongst them.

The local economy was driven, in no small part, by the both the Stock and the Produce Markets with Dandenong referred to far and wide as a *Market Town*. The continued prosperity and growth of the stock market is demonstrated in the following figures. The 1921/1922 yardings included 28,635 cattle, 14,837 calves and 7,982 horses. By 1956/1957, yardings included 82,561 cattle, 98,290 calves, 43,550 pigs and 82,684 poultry pairs.

The market rapidly outgrew its first official site on Lonsdale Street and second site at the corner of Clow and Cleeland Streets. In 1958 the livestock market was separated from the produce market, with the stock market relocated to the Cheltenham Road site. On this site the stock market had the opportunity to expand and develop in its own right.

After the closure of Melbourne's Newmarket Saleyards in 1985, Dandenong was the last metropolitan stock market in Victoria. By 1991, in the market's 125th

year, sales were conducted four days a week but sale numbers were declining. A number of factors contributed to the eventual decision to close the Dandenong Stock Market; these included the increased urbanisation of Dandenong, a shift to regional markets and the reliance on rail transport. The final sale day was December 22, 1998.

To celebrate and recognise the importance of the stock market to the development of the City a number of community projects and celebrations were undertaken in 1998. These included a civic reception, the unveiling of information panels detailing the history and significance of the Dandenong Markets, and a street parade of live animals, vintage cars and trucks and crowds of people in period costume, recreating a time when livestock were driven to market through the streets of Dandenong. In cooperation with author Jenny Ferguson and the Dandenong District Historical Society, the Heritage Planning Unit published and distributed the booklet, *A Concise History of the Dandenong Markets*. The booklet is illustrated with historic archival images of the markets.

The recollections and stories of the people who worked at the market, sold and purchased stock or contributed to the history of the market in other ways have been gathered through the City of Greater Dandenong Oral History Program. The individuals interviewed were able to provide detailed information, coloured with meaning and character, on topics such as the operations of the market; the stockmen, farmers, graziers and dairymen who used the market; auctioneers and livestock transport agents; and the meat industry which grew up around the market. These interviews can be accessed through the oral history audio tapes and written transcriptions at Benga, Heritage Hill Dandenong.

In 2001, the Dandenong Agricultural & Pastoral Society (DAPS) obtained a Centenary of Federation grant to relocate and conserve the former milker cattle sale ring from the livestock market. The ring is now located in Greaves Reserve, Bennett Street - the home of the annual Dandenong Show.

Dandenong Produce Market remains a vibrant operation in the heart of Dandenong, continuing the proud tradition whilst providing a unique shopping experience to locals and visitors alike.

A decade later this exhibition of Sharyn Meade's photographic record of the stock market's operation, recognizes the continuing affection and nostalgia that the City of Greater Dandenong's residents and those previously associated with the market have for the market and the importance of the site for the community in 2008.

The redevelopment of the site into Metro Village 3175 provides one catalyst for change in urban renewal. Implementing new lifestyle opportunities, Dandenong continues to thrive as a regional centre and continues its commitment to sustainable urban living opportunities for this and for generations to come. A city proud of its traditions and its future!

Taking stock

As a girl, photographer Sharyn Meade remembers being taken to buy chickens at the Dandenong stockmarkets. They were an intrinsic part of her childhood. They had always been there.

In December 1998, the stockmarkets closed after operating for more than a century. They had fallen victim to an encroaching suburbia. Dandenong was no longer the gateway to Gippsland's farms.

The markets moved out to Pakenham and are now a highly technological operation. When Meade heard about the impending closure, she wanted to photograph the markets as they were, before the past disappeared.

She would arrive with the workers about 7am and leave in the early afternoon. She also attended night weigh-ins where animals were colour-coded for the next day's auction. She had to earn the trust of the staff, some of whom initially thought she might be an animal liberationist. "They're suspicious of anyone who turns up with a camera because they had significant problems with people wanting to set the animals free," she says.

Once the workers had got used to Meade, they just did their jobs around her, unless there were safety issues.

"Basically, if you're in a runway and there's 20 cattle bowling down at you, you don't want to be there. A few times the guys said, 'Don't go through that pen because the cows are a little uptight today.' As far as I was concerned, it was their place of work, I was visiting and I followed their rules. "

When she began the project, Meade had the idea of creating a record of the markets and their daily operations - the speed of the auctioneers, the work of the drovers and the process of the weigh-in. But while she was taking the pictures, which she shot on black-and-white film with a 35mm camera, she just wanted to get the best shot.

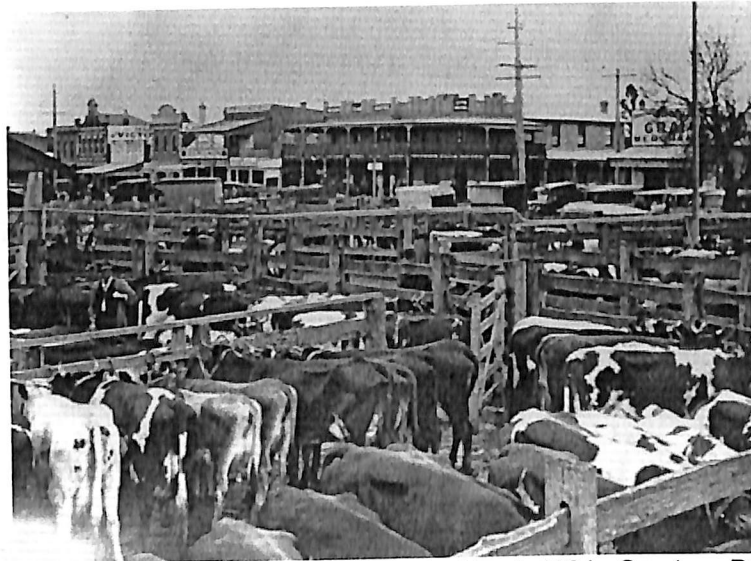
"I think the project crosses over between record and photojournalism," she says. "Some of the people I photographed can actually remember driving cattle up the main street of Dandenong to the auction. So you've got this wonderful sense of connection between the older people and the younger."

She points to a photo of a drover at the Friday horse auctions, whom she refers to as "my cowboy". On the Friday of horse sales he would wear an Akubra, but "any other day, when there were cows around, he would wear a baseball cap. So he actually dressed for what animals they were auctioning that day. I found that really interesting," she says.

Meade also became interested in the linear patterns of the market's structure, accentuated in crisp winter light. "You have so many graphic patterns, because it's all square. You always had to work at eye level because there's nowhere you get up high to shoot. The pens had to be in the images because you couldn't get around them."

Meade says the essence of the project was the passing from old to new. "I'm really sad that it's actually gone." Kyla McFarlane, *The Age*, August 14, 2004

Photographs of earlier stock market sites



The stock market encroaching on Lonsdale Street, 1924. Courtesy D&DHS.



"You can buy or sell anything in the weekly market...", photographs at the Clow Street market, *The Leader* 1947. Courtesy D&DHS.