STORIES ABOUT ST.ALBANS

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS

Edited by Joseph Ribarow
2012

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The photograph on the front cover is of the marriage of Lewis George Self and Marion Grace Trudgen at Footscray, 1911.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the following people for their contributions.

Marion Dodd is the last of the immediate descendents of the McAuley family that selected land from the Overnewton Estate more than a century ago. It was a privilege to talk with her.

Isabelle Davidson came to Sunshine in 1921 and later moved inter-state before returning to Keilor and St Albans. She was one of the few women in the first Redex around Australia car trial. Thanks also to Zane Davidson for details of the family background.

Fred Barlow was the iconic St Albans milkman of the fifties and Jeff Barlow has documented his father's life during the depression and the war. Your work is much appreciated, Jeff.

John Stevens, who has since passed away, was also from a pioneer family and had clear perceptions how hard work and perseverance can eventually bring success to family ventures. A family of leadership.

John Perrett's family took over the general store in 1923 and became central in local folklore for unstinting service to the community. Thank you John for your contribution.

Jimmy and Rae Knowles have been generous with their knowledge and their photographs. True quiet achievers.

Brenda Payne, Gudrun Goddard, Bronwyn Frazer and Sandra Beaver provided information and photos about that quintessentially St Albans superstore, Self Bros & Goddard.

Mary Smith shared her knowledge of local people and history through her recollections and unpublished notes. A real treasure.

Photographs: Jimmy and Rae Knowles, Gavin Aitken, John Perrett, Zane Davidson, Jeff Barlow, Gudrun Goddard, Brenda Payne, Karen Bugeja, Alie Missen, Peter Nowatschenko, Yvonne Correlje.

St Albans Auction image: State Library Victoria, Batten & Percy collection.

St Albans Central image: Land Records Office.

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INTRODUCTION

This year, 2012, is the one-hundred-and-twenty-fifth anniversary of the naming of St Albans as a district. The name was adopted after the local railway station was commissioned and opened in February 1887. This important transport development should have created more opportunities for people to settle in the area, but initially had little direct impact because of the financial downturn of the 1890s, to which land speculation, such as that occurring in the district at the time, may have contributed.

The most significant phase in the settlement of St Albans occurred in the early 1900s when the Closer Settlement Board subdivided the Overnewton Estate into blocks of 200 to 300 acres and offered these for selection. This attracted the new "pioneer" families such as the McAuleys, Boyds, Andersons, Stevens, Colemans, Griffiths, McRaes, King and others, to acquire land along Taylors Road and in the western part of St Albans through to Sydenham. It was a time of optimism for some, that dream of independence for which many people struggled. Some succeeded and others barely survived because of the small lots and poor quality of the land.

An independent observer who visited the Overnewton Estate at the time, the "special correspondent" for The Age, 26 July 1905, had this to say:

> *Overnewton, one of the latest purchases by the Closer Settlement Board, is a property of 10,000 acres, situated on the Keilor Plains. There is some confusion to the name. Some call it Arundel, but it is not Arundel. That is the name of a very valuable small farming property formerly owned my Mr. Robert McDougal, the famous breeder of Shorthorn cattle. It is stated that the Government has also purchased Arundel. If so, that should be an ideal property for closer settlement, as very small blocks on that little estate could be made abundantly productive. Arundel, although limited in area, comprises some of the richest of the land immediately round Keilor. You do not get to Overnewton until you descend into the flats at Keilor and rise the hill on the other side. Here one enters upon the plateau of the Keilor Plains, which is an exceptionally cold, bleak, treeless country, and very stony. Overnewton is a sheep station, formerly occupied by Mr. William Taylor, of Keilor, and afterwards belonging to the present vendors. Of the Keilor Plains stony country, probably Overnewton is the stoniest. The stoniness varies in character. In some parts the stones are so thick that there are more stones than ground. In others the boulders are not so large, but almost everywhere thickly distributed.*
>
> *The grass amongst the stones, wherever the sheep can get at it, is the sweetest, but at the best it is only up to a sheep to the acre capacity. As such it is entered in the Land Tax Register as fourth class grazing property. In that*

register the property is recorded as comprising 12,880 acres. The best of the land, which has been retained, is nearest to Keilor, around Mr. Taylor's homestead. The 10,000 acres the Government has purchased is further out on the plain. … What the prospective selectors complain about is that the stones preclude the land being used for anything but grazing, and that grazing land is no use to them, because under the act the maximum is £1500 worth per settler. They are informed that the price will not be less than £6 per acre, and that means only 250 acres each. One sheep to the acre yields about 4/- per acre for wool growing, and they urge that the gross returns from 250 acres carrying sheep will not pay for land at £6 per acre. As to dairying, that is impossible without cultivation of fodder for the cows, and on this plain, which is described as the bleakest and coldest country they ever visited, it will take as much food to simply maintain the animal heat of the cows as it takes in sheltered districts to keep them altogether in first class milk production condition. As to the question of the stony character of the property, the writer, as the result of a very careful examination of the whole estate, is forced to admit that about one-third of the 10,000 acres is of the quarry class of rockiness, another third too stony for ploughing, and the balance free enough from stones to get a plot for cultivation amongst it in spots.

The soil in itself, though not very attractive looking, could be got to grow fair crops of hay with the help of about 50 or 60 lb. of super. per acre. That is, assuming a plough could be got into it. The soil is a reddish brown loam thinly overlying a clayey subsoil, resembling land further along in the Melton district, from which good hay crops are obtained. The Melton land, however, is in most parts altogether, and in other parts comparatively free from stones. A farmer met in the Melton direction was asked how would he work a 250-acre block on the Overnewton Estate.

Well, he said, I wouldn't attempt cultivation, because there is no end to the stones. They don't all show on the top. It's only when you attempt to plough even the apparently clear spots that you find how many there are underneath.

Well, if you would not attempt cultivation, what would you do?

Graze it. Take in grazers, for which you can get 1/6 a week for horses and 9d. to a 1/- for cattle. Otherwise I would buy young poddy stores [sic], and graze them until they grew into marketable age at a profit.

Could you not get land fit for this grazing business at less than £6 per acre? – Yes, of course I could.

Then, could you oblige me, as a practical man, with your opinion as to the wisdom of the Government purchasing land at £6 per acre for closer settlement that can only be used for grazing? – Oh, my opinion don't amount to much. All I know is I'm not taking any Overnewton land. It is to be assumed that the Closer

Settlement Board had their reasons for making this purchase. I think they ought to be asked their reasons. All who know this land, I have no doubt, would be interested to hear them. I know I would.

And that was pretty well the sentiments of a group of seekers for land who had been visiting the estate, and were interviewed by the writer on the way back to the city. One said he was attracted by the name "Arundel," and said he would not have taken the trouble to come out to see Overnewton because he was quite familiar with that country before when it was on a previous occasion offered for sale.

The character of the estate may be summarised as quite agreeing with its classification in the land tax register, viz. fourth class grazing country, capable of improved grazing capacity by the planting of timber belts to modify its intense bleakness. The soil also would be capable of hay growing if it could be ploughed, but the thickness and widespread distribution of the stones throughout the whole of the land practically precludes cultivation. Therefore, as exclusively grazing land a settler would require at least 500 acres, and that at the price stated, £6 per acre, amounts to £3000, or just double the maximum area, viz. £1500, worth allowed under the Closer Settlement Act. As an adjunct to about 50 acres of land of the richest land on the Keilor flats, about 200 acres of the plains would do as an outlet area in conjunction, assuming that it could be obtained at a reasonable grazing price per acre.

The Boyd family was one that did take up the challenge. In December 1905 they signed up for their conditional purchase lease of a farm allotment under the Closer Settlement Act of 1904 for "*three hundred and eight acres three roods and three perches more or less.*" It was a big triangle of land east of the railway line with a narrow part on Taylors Road and then stretching north and northeast as far as the Melton-Keilor road and the "Keilor Road" railway station, which was at Sydenham. The land was valued at £1,500. Payment for the allotment was to be spread over thirty-two years with half-yearly payments of £45. Was this a lot of money? The short answer is yes.

In 1907 Justice Higgins in the Harvester judgement concluded that a fair and reasonable minimum wage for unskilled workers was 42/- per week (based on a six-day working week). Using this estimate, £1,500 represents nearly 14 years of an unskilled worker's gross wage. Such a worker would have had to set aside 82% of their gross wage just to meet their annual instalments, which would have been impossible. Using current figures for the ordinary earnings of those at the lowest wage, the price of the Boyds' allotment was the equivalent of $430,000 in today's money, with annual repayments of about $26,000 for marginal farming land that might support only 300 sheep. It is no wonder that some families found repayments a struggle.

As forewarned in the Age article quoted above, a number of these early selectors found the allotments were not big enough and the pastures not good enough for viable farming. Though it is difficult to know if it was typical, the Boyd case is a real example and several of their contemporaries have commented about the family experiencing difficult times. As John Stevens, a descendent of another of those pioneer families, has said: "*I don't know how those things were managed at that time because everybody was just poor - poor, poor, poor*." In 1935 Boyd appealed against the council's valuation of his farm. At that stage only 60 of his 300 acres had been cleared, indicating that maybe only 20% of the farm was suitable for cultivation. Boyd argued that he was losing about £100 per year because the land could only support one sheep per acre and that the council rates of £188 per annum were excessive. He had the property in the hands of an auctioneer at £12 per acre, and would sell it for £11. His appeal for a reduction in rates was dismissed.

In contrast, Farquhar Macrae, at the Keilor end of Taylors Road, was more successful and maybe this was because he had a bigger estate where he bred sheep, cattle, and several types of horses as well as growing fodder. He listed his property for auction in 1927 when he was retiring due to ill health. Macrae's farm was bigger than the Boyd's and it was in two lots, one in his name and another in his wife's name, totalling 480 acres. He also had much higher expectations on the value of his "well improved" farm and rejected offers of £22 per acre. But perhaps the depression had dampened the demand by the time the Boyds were hopeful of selling their property a few years later.

Obviously some people did survive and prosper, though many if not most of the second generation abandoned farming for other careers and livelihoods. Some established their own businesses in trades or professional services, commerce, real estate, property development and other investments. The family farms were eventually sold and became neighbourhoods in their own right: Stevensville, Kings Park, Keilor Downs, Taylors Lakes, Kealba, Delahey, Albanvale. The descendents of some pioneer families still live in the district, while others have retired to places like Gippsland or Ocean Grove and even as far away as Queensland.

The following stories are about families who are directly related to the above era or came somewhat later, but all have contributed to the development of community. They are stories about the transition of St Albans from a sparse rural district to a number of crowded suburban neighbourhoods.

Joseph Ribarow

MARION DODD née McAULEY

James and Margaret McAuley came to St Albans c.1905 when they acquired a portion of the Overnewton Estate. Their son, Ambrose James, and daughter-in-law, Marion, also settled locally and one of their children, also named Marion, is the last living child of this family. In 2005, a century after her grandparents arrived in the area, she graciously agreed to share her memories of growing up on the family farm while observing the growth and progress of the surrounding area through the thirties to the fifties.

My grandparents, James and Margaret McAuley, were country farming people from Quambatook, which is about 300 kilometres northwest of Melbourne, out past Bendigo way. It's a wheat and sheep farming area that developed in the 1870s after the gold rushes when squatters' land became available for selection. These days it has a small and declining population, and I think in 2000 the township had only about 250 people.

James and Margaret McAuley came to St Albans about 1904-05 looking to establish their own farm. Farming was about the only industry in St Albans at the time, it was either that or working in the quarry, but that may have come a bit later. McKays was the only real manufacturing industry in the area, and that was in Sunshine, or else people went to work in Footscray.

People started coming to St Albans because they wanted to have their own farm. There were about three farming families around our neighbourhood when my grandparents first arrived and these were some of the original farming families of St Albans. My grandparents selected land on the north-west corner of Taylors and Sydenham roads. To the west of them was Jack Coleman and his two sisters,[1] and on the eastern side of the railway line lived Mr and Mrs Jonathan Boyd, who stayed in St Albans until they were well into their eighties.[2]

When my grandfather died[3] my grandmother moved to Footscray to live, and my father took over the running of the farm. My father had about 11 acres in East Esplanade, but after grandfather died dad sold his property and took over the old farm.

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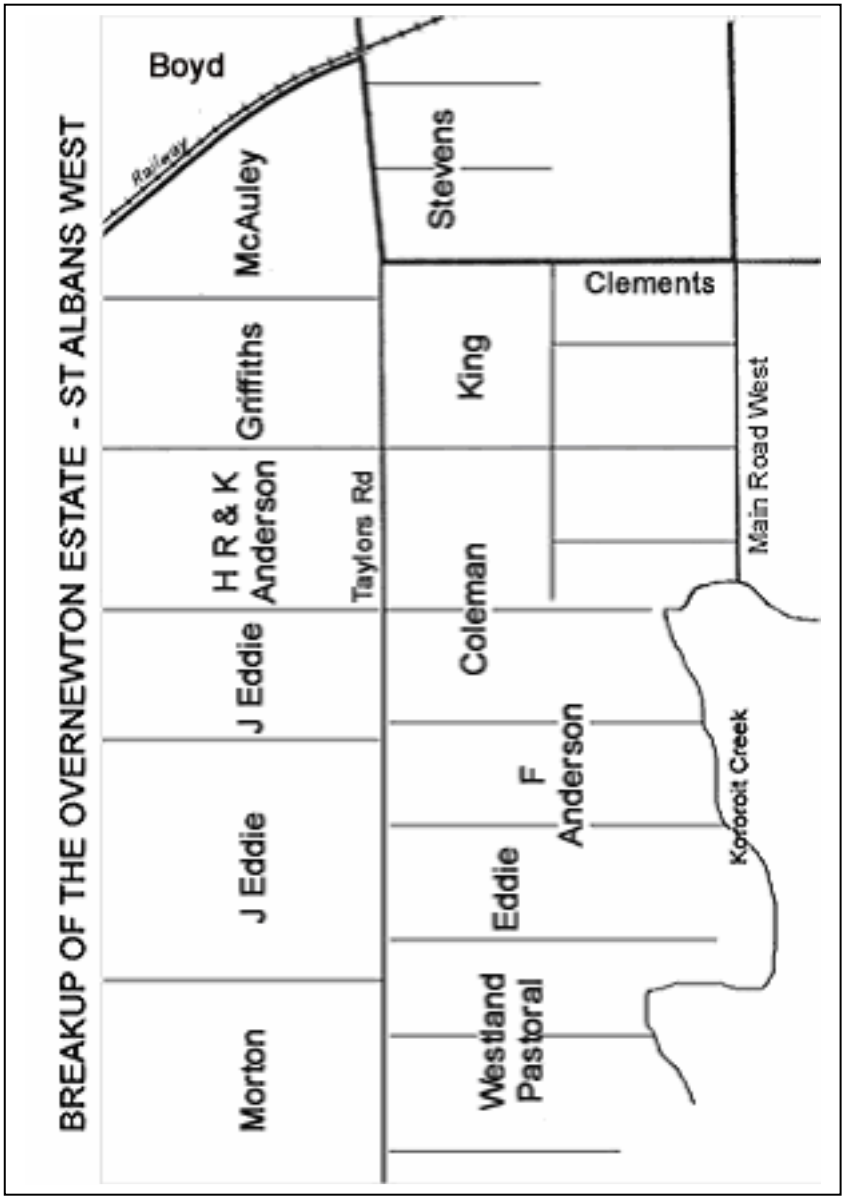
[1] John and Mary Coleman came to St Albans c.1904. They had three children: Jack, Nellie, and Sara.
[2] Jonathan Boyd died on 7 August 1944 and Emily Boyd died on 18 August 1944.
[3] James McAuley died in 1919.

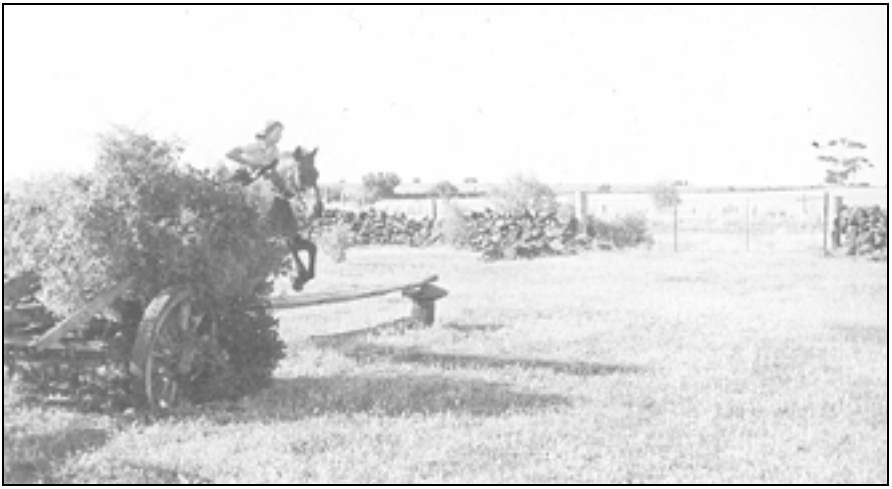


The breakup of the Overnewton Estate, St Albans West
Original map courtesy of Gavin Aitken

My father was Ambrose James McAuley, and I was named after my mother, Marion McAuley. I had two sisters, Clair and Alma, and also two brothers, Finlay and Harold. Harold had Down's syndrome, so my mother went through a lot looking after him, because he needed caring all his life. In the end, Harold died of cancer in 1962 at the age of 38.

Ours was a mixed farm. It was a big triangular property along Taylors Road between Sydenham and Kings roads and then stretching north almost halfway to Sydenham. We had pigs, cattle, calves, a few dairy cows, and also grew some crops as stock feed. Then in the 1930s the farm was more or less confiscated by the PMG – the Post Master General – because they wanted that land to erect the radio broadcasting tower.[1] They let us lease the land but with restrictions on how you could use it, so that we could only graze sheep.

That put paid to my father's efforts to make the farm profitable, because when it was our own property we had cows, pigs, crops and everything there.



A paddock on the McAuley farm. To the left of the picture are the remains of the horsedrawn lorry that brought the family from Quambatook.

We still had land on the south side where they used to put crops in, where the Pacific Can factory was. That was my father's land. We owned that 90

[1] The first reports that the ABC was looking at the McAuley property as an appropriate site were discounted in March 1937 as being "practically unfounded."

acres, but we didn't own where we lived. We also had an extra bit of property that we called 'the lane'. It was a piece of land owned by the railways that was adjacent to our property and went down from Taylors Road along the railway line nearly to the school. The railways leased that to us at twenty shillings a week.

It was all farming up our road anyway. When I was growing up Mr Les King and his family had the dairy just up the road from us on the south side. The Anderson family were also farming on the eastern side of the railway. Remember the house that was juts out in Taylors Road because they decided they didn't want to have their room cut off when the road was being made? That was their place. They came out here after my parents.

Everyone relied on rainwater for domestic use. Every house had one or two water tanks connected to the spouting. We also had water for the stock at the house but that had to be carted in. My brother used the horses to cart water, but in the finish he had the tractor instead of the horses, because gradually the horses died out and they weren't replaced because machinery was coming on the scene. He was still carting water in the seventies because in the dry weather the water troughs for the sheep had to be filled up every three days or so.

We had a wood stove. My father used to come up to Toolern Vale of a weekend and stay overnight to collect firewood. He'd collect logs as long as the dray to take back and cut up. There was always some timber about. Sheds would collapse and you'd use the old supports for firewood. The kitchen stove was wood fired (cooking was a bit tough in the hot weather) and of course there were the open fireplaces in the other rooms. You could put half a tree on those. Perretts sold firewood as well, because everyone had wood stoves. So, though we didn't have many trees we didn't have problems with firewood.

We had an ice chest when Self[1] started delivering ice in St Albans. After that we had a kerosene fridge, because there was no electricity in the house, even in the later years. Electricity came to the town in 1940, but Dad couldn't pay to have it connected. We were never hungry, but there weren't the pounds and pounds just to be tossed aside and used willy nilly.

[1] Norman Self started a wood and ice round with his brother Dudley. They were sons of Lewis and Marion Self, who, with other family members, had established Self Brothers and Goddard. Block ice was still being delivered in St Albans during the 1950s.

If you could manage without it, you did without it. We had kerosene lamps, and then the Tilly lamps that were pumped up and had a funny mantle. The house was never connected to the electricity. When Stevensville was developed was probably when water and electricity came past the house.

An interest with lot of people at the time was to have a cow for milking and some people would also separate the cream and make butter. My brother would go every so often to the different residents and take their unwanted calves to Brooklyn sale yards for them. I can remember my sister of a Saturday cutting hay into chaff and we'd go selling the chaff to people who had a cow. The chaff cutter was horse driven, so you'd have the horse going round and round to make the chaff cutter work. We'd take a wagon, not quite as heavy as a dray, and a medium-sized horse that would go at a trot.

Ours was a mixed farm. Dad raised cattle; they'd milk some, and raise calves, off course. So we had cows, pigs, sheep, and chooks. Everybody had chooks in those days. We also had some ducks, geese and turkeys. Turkeys were popular at Christmas time so we always had a few orders for those. Of course we had horses. Two horses were used for carting water, and you needed four horses for pulling the big binder when the oaten hay was being cut.

We went through droughts and there wasn't always the food for stock. When we grew our own crops we always had the haystacks, and you had that to carry you over the hard times. Once they took that property away from us and the lease arrangement was that you couldn't make any dust, so you couldn't put the crops in; it was just for grazing. There were times when we were buying the hay from Landers at Sydenham to feed the stock. Sometimes you couldn't go out into the yard with a bucket in your hand because you'd have 50 sheep chasing you everywhere – they reckoned you had something for them to eat. There were just as many bad times then as there are now. At least in those days you had the wool return, which was profitable, and the lamb sales, so you had two incomes. When the bottom fell out of the wool market that put paid to a lot of small sheep farmers. That's why many farmers have diversified and got hold of something else.

Carting Water

We had water on our property for the stock, but that was dam water, not town water. They put a viaduct through the area we used to call the gully. We had a big dam on the other side, and that's where we'd used to drive the cattle to drink. There was another big dam in Theodore Street. We

used to call it the reservoir; it never was dry, but it wasn't really a reservoir. You had to drive your stock there when the other water dried up. Council filled it in during the fifties and later developed it as a nature reserve, but in the heavy rains the area would still get flooded.

My brother used to cart water for local residents because there was no water laid on in the neighbourhood. At first he had to go to Deer Park because there wasn't even a hydrant in St Albans; we didn't have any connected water supply at all. He went to Deer Park near the old school in Station Road. Then, in the 1930s after the water was laid on in St Albans, a hydrant was put into Biggs Street just outside the house of Mrs White, so she had the key to the hydrant. Her house was just off the Esplanade. It cost thruppence to use the key.

Later they put in another hydrant with an overhead pipe in Main Road West where you could fill a tank. By then lots of people in the town had water, but not further out on the farms. My brother still had to cart water for the stock, because the dams would dry out in the summer, and water was needed to fill the troughs for the sheep and cows. It was still all tank water out on the farms.

Harvesting Crops

Mostly we grew wheat and oaten hay as the crops on the farm. In the summer when the oaten hay was ready to be cut we had four guys come to strip the grain heads if you were doing that, though we mostly left the grain in the sheaves. The harvesting team worked with a huge machine drawn by four horses with a big batten knocking the stalks down, binding them into sheaves, and then dropping them off in bundles. They'd lie there about two weeks, then the men would stook the sheaves, which meant standing them up into little pyramids with about eight sheaves in each bundle. They would stand there maybe five weeks. Then the men would come with pitchforks and a big wagon. The blokes on the ground would use the pitchforks to throw the sheaves up on the wagon, where another man would be stacking them. When the wagon was full they'd move to wherever they'd decided to build the haystack. There were about six men doing this every Christmas. Mum would be cooking for them and it would mean having the stove going during the hottest of days.

When my father was working the farm there was a place, Schutt and Barry in West Footscray near the corner of Geelong and Williamstown roads, where he sold a lot of hay for the local market and also for export. We kept some

hay to feed the stock over the bad times when grass was not available.

Sheep Farming

Shearing was another time that Mum cooked for the workers; it was the normal practise. At first Bob McRae, the one who died in the fire,[1] would come to shear the sheep. He used to do it with hand shears. By the time Mr Eddie was running his sheep they had the motorised shears. After Bob McRae died, Mick Weibrecht who lived near Victoria Crescent, came to do the shearing at our place. I think Doris McIntosh might have got him released from serving in the army because that was classified as an essential service. Then my brother learnt to do it. In the good seasons we might have had four or five hundred sheep; in later times it might have been three hundred. In a productive season you might get two truckloads of lambs, which probably meant about fifty lambs. At the price and the wages you got the equivalent, plus the wool, which meant you had two incomes. Then the wool market died a sudden death. Our sheep were not the top quality breed, they were cross bred, but the wool was still viable and it was good. My brother used to take the fleeces to Tottenham and sell it to Australian Estates.

Sheep grazing on a St Albans farm. 1960s.

[1] Bob McRae died in the fire that destroyed his hut near the corner of Driscoll and Taylors roads in April 1960. He was 83 years of age.

Once we lost the land to the PMG it started to fall apart, because we couldn't grow the crops. Dad kept the lease on that old property but because he could no longer grow the hay or other crops he finished up going out to work at McKays. That would have been about 1938 when I was eleven. My brother just kept sheep grazing on that old land because the PMG wouldn't let you use it for anything else. When my dad was working the farm they were the good times because you'd get two incomes from the sheep. Then you'd take half a dozen calves to the market, and when the piglets were big enough they'd also go in. As times went on the farming became less profitable. Then with the war coming on there wasn't enough work on the farm and so my dad went to work for H V McKay in Sunshine. Once Dad started working outside, and once the size of the farm was reduced, father would have been better off to have moved out all together.

They kept some cows for milking, the others they'd let the calves stay with the mother and when they were 8 or 9 months they were in the lorry to the market if they were a bull. We never sold milk except if anyone came and asked for it. We only milked for what we could use, and what we didn't use we fed to the pigs. When Dad started working at McKays we stopped with the pigs and never replaced them. Off course it became that you could go to the butchers for your meat, but before then the butchers weren't around and Dad used to do our own butchering, mostly sheep. Once he started at McKays it was too much to do and the shops had started, so it was easier to go and buy something than to rear animals. My father kept the sheep and two cows, and there was one horse left. Kevin Barnard took the other horse, as by then he had a few acres in Toolern Vale.

My father was still there on the farm until 1976, then he passed away. My brother could have leased the land, but he said no. By this time there was trouble with the sheep being mauled by dogs every time you'd go up to have a look. The sheep were sold when my brother decided not to renew the lease.

Growing Up

I was born in 1927 and was the second youngest of the children; I had two brothers and two sisters. One brother didn't go to school because he had Down's syndrome. The other brother and my two sisters and I all went to the St Albans state school in West Esplanade. I started school when I was four, which was fairly young in comparison to some of the other students.

The days seemed longer then. As we were growing up our chores were to

feed the chooks, gather the eggs, and gather twigs and small branches to light the fire. Later as the girls grew older and my brother Harold needed more care we did all the shopping. He was always like a young child and it took the efforts of both Mum and I to bathe him. It was difficult.

I walked a lot. In the mornings we'd wait for the King girls[1] to come down and we'd all walk to school along the railway line and walk home again at the end of the day. There was a channel that you could walk through and there was a little foot bridge, but you could never get on that when it was flooded, so we used to walk along the railway line to get to school. You had to be careful there was no train coming. When it rained we used to get up on the railway line because the low area used to flood. We used to call it the gully.

At primary school we only had about four teachers. We were all pretty much of a muchness and we were all happy. There were only six in the class when I got to the eighth grade. I think I was the only girl in that class because Dorothy McIntosh left earlier. School never bothered me; I never minded going. It was a very small room as there was just the one building, but we still got all the three Rs and whatever. We'd go to Keilor for the inter-school sports and the Keilor gift.

I was young during the Depression and don't remember much about it other than it didn't seem to effect us, but I knew other girls whose fathers weren't working and they never got money in the hand. In the Depression the men had to go where they were sent, and many were sent making roads around the district, or they might be given some work digging ditches for the water mains. One friend's father was sent out to Toolern Vale making roads. They didn't get money for that work, they got food vouchers.

In those days if anybody had anything that a child had grown out of they'd say 'Would you take these?' or 'Do you want these?' People were glad to get something, because there were at least 4 or 5 children in each family to feed and clothe. People battled through.

You could leave school at the age of 14 then, which is what happened to my brother Finlay. He stayed home after that to work on the farm. My older sister Clair also stayed at home after she turned 14 to work on the farm because girls weren't expected to go out to work, except when the war was on and they wanted women to work in the ammunition factories.

[1] Mavis, Phyllis and Beryl.

St Albans Primary School, West Esplanade

My sisters worked in Deer Park in the munitions, and the two King girls were also working there. I was at school during that time. I stayed at the state school till Grade 8 and then went to Sunshine Tech.

There were few places to go to after you finished at the local state school. Originally there would have been only the Williamstown High that you could go to, but I didn't want to go there because I was only twelve. I finished up at Sunshine Tech, which had an all-girls section and was quite good. Being so young you had to go on, you couldn't leave school at twelve. There were about half a dozen girls from St Albans all my age who were going there; one might have gone to Williamstown High, but the Tech was the answer for most of us. They taught office work, typing, shorthand, dressmaking and such.

Entertainment

As we got a bit older my older sister and I would often visit relatives on a Sunday; we used to go to my grandmother, who lived in Barkly Street Footscray. The trains would start by 10 a.m. and we'd be home by 6 p.m. We had the safest time as far as travelling was concerned – there was no bother about kids being frightened. Prior to that my father would have driven in to see his mother but as we got a bit older we were allowed to go by train.

Being that far away we didn't mix as much with the other children as you would if you were living in town. We would go to the library every Thursday and we'd congregate around there. Two brothers by the name of Turner were caretakers. You paid thruppence to borrow the book. Mostly we went dancing for our entertainment.

We made our own amusement. We were in the basketball team and that got us around a little bit. We'd play of an afternoon at Sunshine, Altona, or Royal Park. We were in the B grade. We'd practise on Errington Reserve, which had a court. We also played there whenever it was our turn to have home games. The tennis courts were also there. Mrs Errington donated that land, and Mr King donated land for a sports reserve out his way, which was another good thing. I remember Bob Errington. Then with the clubs we just ran the dances, and there was always supper afterwards.

On a Sunday we'd go riding around Deer Park, Derrimut, and Fitzgerald Road and come back through Sunshine. There were no busses then. Now you could hop on a train and bus and be driven all around the city. We

covered a lot of territory on the push bikes. We used to go over to Keilor and ride our bikes as far as Essendon airport. We'd go on a Sunday, a couple of girls, my sister and I. We'd take our lunch, prop the bikes on the side of the road and have a picnic. It was totally different, as just about nothing was ever open on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday. We used to take our own bottle of water. Now they're open seven days a week. Mum knew we were going; she didn't mind because there was no traffic. You could go from here to Brooklyn and not see anybody on the road. The only accident you could have was falling off the bike.

Lots of people went with their fox terriers and their ferrets to go rabbiting. The people carried their ferrets in shaped boxes. Rabbits were people's mainstay food item at some stages, particularly in the Depression. Most of the boys learnt to shoot. They'd go by bike to places, like Kealba, which were all paddocks. Rabbit skins used to be sold in North Melbourne. People used to save their rabbit skins and stretch them over a wire frame. My brother used to do that; we also got the odd fox or two. My brother would also go eeling in what they now call Taylors Lakes. It was only a dam, never a lake. They'd go of an evening with a Hurricane lamp to catch the eels.

It got better as things progressed because different clubs started up, the football club and everything. Prior to that I don't know what the boys would have done for entertainment. I suppose there was swimming in the river down at the end of Biggs Street. I didn't go there myself. There was another spot in Arundel near the rickety wooden bridge. I used to hate going over that. Mrs Gibson, who lived in St Albans on the corner of the Esplanade near the Mechanics Hall, lost her husband there because of an accident. He was working on the spillway when the accident happened and he drowned. Mrs Gibson was a McRae, a relative of those McRaes[1] on the road to Keilor. There were a Hazel and Bessie McRae in Winifred Street, but they weren't related to Mrs Gibson.

We lived a fair way from the station but once we got bikes it was alright. The train on a Sunday ran every couple of hours and I think the last one was about 10 o'clock to come home. That was a bit of a problem. Nobody had cars; there were just a couple around St Albans at the time. Mostly we relied on bikes. We didn't know any different because there was nothing else to do.

Movies were held in Sunshine and we used to go there on a Saturday.

[1] Mrs Catherine Gibson was a sister of Farquhar MacRae.

We'd all ride our bikes to the station and take the train. We'd ride our bikes to Sydenham to the dances at the hall there, and we'd come back in the dark with no lights on the bikes.

Then Mavis King, being older than us, met her future husband, Bill Hunter, and he had a car. So then we went to the dances in style. There were about six of us who lived near each other in Taylors Road: girls from the Anderson and King families, and my sister and I. (The Anderson family were related to the King family through marriage, because Leslie King married Ethel Anderson in 1920.) We progressed and Bill had a car so we didn't have to ride the bikes to the dances any more.

When the war years came along there were blackouts but the dancing went on. There were no boys so we all had to dance with girls in those days. We would go to dances at the Mechanics Institute hall in East Esplanade; they were held there once a week. As we got older Sydenham started to hold some dances, and I'd also go to Sunshine – that was a little bit further advanced with more people.

Shopping

The McGraths had a big grocery shop in Sunshine. They used to come up with the groceries and it was a swap. Mother would give them the cream and butter and we would get the groceries.

Mr Tong and his daughter would come up once week with Doherty's horse and cart delivering bread in Taylors Road.[1] Prior to that we had Mr Jongebloed from Melton coming once a week to Taylors Road. He would have done the Andersons and the Boyds, but only along Taylors Road. I don't think he went into the town. We used to have the big high tin loaves. No cut loaves then.

When we lost the corner acres where they built the 3LO transmitting station they built the caretaker's home and some other buildings there for the workers. Mr Hoskin was the caretaker's name. We used to get their bread left at our place and Mrs Hoskin would walk down in the evening to pick it up.

[1] The Dohertys had established a bakery in Sunshine and delivered bread in neighbouring areas. Mr Albert Tong purchased the bread delivery for St Albans from Mr Troutbeck in 1933. Mr and Mrs Tong were British immigrants who lived in Elizabeth Street behind the Perrett's grocery store.

Mr and Mrs Tong and the baker's cart.
(Source: St Albans The First Hundred Years)

McGrath's General Store, Sunshine
(Image courtesy of Sunshine Cavalcade, 1951)

We went to the Perrett's store to collect our mail. That was the only shop we had for years. He handled everything. The Perretts ran that for years.

For banking we'd go to Sunshine at the Post Office there, because they always were an outlet for the State Bank.

We used to have an Indian hawker who used to come about twice a year with his old horse and cart. He travelled for miles. Whenever he came he pulled into our yard. He'd have linen, ladies' overall-aprons, whatever. He'd stay overnight and tootle off again. I don't know if he went to the town but he came past the farms.

As we grew older my sisters and I did the weekly shopping. We always did it on a Saturday: two trips down to the shops, with a string bag on each handlebar of the bike. When the north wind was blowing you'd be battling the whole way home.

When we were working, once a fortnight or once a month we'd have a day off work and take mother to Footscray. That was the only time she had for herself because you couldn't leave my brother on his own.

When mother wanted to get anywhere we'd put the horse in the jinker for her. People would tie up their horses at the railway station in a little space where Mr Hill[1] used to take his cream cans; it was a little laneway. We'd take them out of the shafts, give them a bit of chaff, and tie them to the fence rails. The Scullies used to do that also.

We used to go to the city to buy clothing and shoes, and occasionally to the films. It was the place to go. Footscray had Forges, but if you wanted anything really special the city was the place to go because there were shops like Wittners and Portmans. Nobody had any money but there were plenty of shops and they were all reasonably priced. We always made sure we went to Myers – you didn't go to town unless you went to Myers – because you could start at the bottom and work your way up and even have your meal there.

We used to pay a visit to the Victoria Market. Everybody used to enjoy going there. Mrs Harris, Mrs Walker and lots of the mothers used to go there every Friday and they'd have the big suitcases, getting all the week's

[1] Probably referring to Phillip Charles Hill who had a dairy on the corner of Sunshine Avenue and Biggs Street.

vegetables for the family. Mrs Walker eventually got a car and would take some of the women in every Friday. My dad used to go in occasionally with the horse and cart and I always remember him coming home with little bunches of lucerne, which cost about thruppence, just for the horses that had gone to the market.

Distances

Everything seemed so far away. You would get off the station and you'd look up and think 'I've still got to walk up all that road.' It was about a mile, but it only seems like half that distance now. Sydenham seemed as if was miles away. We used to come up the back way. It was only a dirt track, Victoria Street that comes out by the speedway, but it was only fit for a horse and cart. You couldn't drive a car along it or your bike. That was a short cut to go to places like Diggers Rest or Toolern Vale.

We didn't interact much with the people living in the town and I kept mainly to the west side of St Albans. A lot of the area was vacant land and the houses were scattered.

I didn't even go looking to see where the High School was when that was built. The people in town mixed more because they had closer neighbours than we did out on the farms. We didn't have any that close to us and the ones that were were adults anyway. When they married they also moved to the town and had their children there. For us, because the Griffiths' children were years older than us anyway, the boys went to Balliang. That's where the Kings Road continues on now.

However, we used to ride our bikes down the old Green Gully Road. Mother had to pay rates – I don't recall whether it was the land rates or the dog registration – but we used to go to Keilor once every year with the horse and jinker. When we got to Green Gully we used to get out to walk and let the horse pull the empty jinker, because it was quite steep. It was very good when they finally improved that road, because it was a treacherous and narrow road. Of course there weren't the cars then, but it was still a treacherous stretch for any set of wheels to take to.

People

The McRaes were early farmers in the area; they were also on Taylors Road but more towards Green Gully. Bob McRae used an old railway guard van as a

sleepout and he died when that caught on fire [in April 1960]. He was the one that sheared our sheep, which was done with the hand shears in those days.

St Albans Central circa 1930. Source: Land Records Office.

The Stevens' property and that of my father's shared a boundary fence. I think James Stevens bought that land a couple years after my grandparents got theirs. The Stevens family were crop farmers also. I don't think the boys took it on as a living though John took it on for a while to help the family. They finished up running the hardware and timber store; I think that was Garfield. I think John Stevens died about a year ago. He was a good singer.

The Stevens were a good family.[1] Mrs Stevens was tall and very outgoing. She ran the school mother's club and organised the concerts. She also organised the speech nights for school prizes, because our exams were at the end of the year then. I think the Stevens boys got their singing voices from her. Doug was a good singer. They were older than me. They'd come over sometimes because the back of their property was just over the road from ours.

The Eddies had a sheep farm further up from us. Our property finished up at Kings Road, more or less, on the other side. The Griffith's property started the other side of the fence, then Mr Coleman and the Kings were neighbours. Mr Coleman never married either; he had the chook farm but also ran a few cows as well.

The Luxfords were an old family that lived in the town. The Calders were more farming people. They were on the corner of Main Road West and Station Road, and had a lot of fruit trees. They were related to the other Calders that were closer to us.

Further down Main Road West past the Calders the Dales had a piggery. That was a far as you could go down Main Road West.

There were two Toby families. I remember them because they had a cow that kept rushing anyone that came near her. They eventually asked Dad to take her to the auctions but no-one would buy her, so he brought her home.

The McIntoshes were near the school; he worked for the railways. There was another house near the school, that's where Mrs Syddall was living. Further along there were the Erringtons, Lodges, and people named Douglas, who, I think, also worked on the railways. The Whites were in

[1] As example of this, in December 1932 McAuley was carting in his harvest when he was called away because of a death in the family. Although he was busy with his own crop at the time, Mr Stevens nevertheless organised some friends and carried on with the carting in of McAuley's crop.

Biggs Street, and Mr White used to have pointers and come hunting for quail. Quail were around in those days.

I remember Fred Sheurer who had the real estate agency for Sydenham.[1] He always said the area would was going to go ahead, which it did, but he didn't live to see it. That was a rough old road. Everyone made a track alongside the metal, didn't they? That was ready for improvement. There weren't that many people living in Sydenham: there were the Landers, the Wrights, and the Harries who had the shop – it was never open! We'd ride our bikes there of a Sunday and it was rarely open. I don't think there were many shops open anywhere when we were growing up. I don't know whether that was because of the war or because they didn't have much to sell. In Sunshine you'd be lucky and find something there, maybe. You could ride to Ballarat Road and just go across the paddocks after that.

Mr Harold Knowles had a fair bit to do with land. He married one of the Boyds[2] and lived not far from the church. The family established a number of shops in St Albans.

The Leckies lived not far from us at one stage. Mr Leckie worked at the quarry and I think he was one of the men who were injured there. Alf Leckie was a strong Labor man. Mr Self, who ended up owning the SSW store, also worked at the quarry and was injured there also. It folded sometime after that.[3]

Mr Fox was from St Albans but had the real estate agency in Sunshine; he had two sons.

There weren't too many houses around us at first: there was us, the Griffiths, then the Foxes, the Eddies, and then the Mortons, but their house was well back, you wouldn't see it from Taylors Road where it became Gourlay Road. On the south side of us going west there was Jack Coleman and another Anderson family (this was before John Stevens built his house up there) and Gilbertsons, the butchers, had a property where those pine trees are at the

[1] At one stage Fred Sheurer was running the small milk bar cum grocery in Sydenham. He was also involved in a real estate agency in St Albans in the seventies, on the corner of Collins Street and Main Road East.
[2] Harold Knowles married Myrtle Boyd, who was the daughter of Jonathan and Emily Boyd. Harold and Myrtle lived in East Esplanade.
[3] The St Albans Quarry Company Pty Ltd was formed in 1913 and closed in 1935.

end of Taylors Road. They had agistment for the stock out there. They had caretakers looking after the property, people named Blair. They had that for years, but were the last caretakers there that I can remember. We drove cows up there to be loaded up because Gilbertson was buying them.

The Driscoll's house was near the river in the area now called Kealba; now there's a road named after them. Mr Hill with the cream was from out that way as well, and they were about the only two houses down there. An old lady by the name of Annie Collingwood used to have a little camp near where Phil Hill lived, and she might have used the shed occasionally. Annie used to come around the district with her pram selling safety pins, elastic, pins, studs, and all little knick knacks. She must have had a bad time in the winter. I don't know where she came from and what happened to her. We used to call her "Flying Kate," but I don't know where we got that name. What a life she must have had.

Work

I spent two years at Sunshine Tech, and then went to work for a money lender in Footscray, doing office work. The money wasn't very good in those days and in the latter part of the war I went to work in Deer Park with my sister. There was more money in working at the munitions factory. I ended up working in the packing section at Nettlefolds[1] and stayed there until 1960. Nettlefolds manufactured a variety of screws and fastenings. They came out from England after the First World War but they only wanted English people; after that it changed. A lot of companies that set up in Sunshine brought out people, probably because they knew the jobs. There weren't many factories around here before then anyway.

Clair and I were both working at Nettlefolds. The Wunderlich factory[2] was operating further down McIntyre Road. Mochries[3] had the cabinet making place in Sunshine, and lots of boys went there for apprenticeships.

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[1] It was near the Albion railway station, on the corner of Ballarat and McIntyre roads.
[2] Wunderlich manufactured cement sheet and terra cota products. Their former building is now part of the Westend Market.
[3] George Mochrie was an immigrant for Scotland who arrived in Australia in 1912. In 1920 he started a small cabinet-making business in Sunshine. His first factory was burnt down but he was encouraged by HV McKay who helped him restart by sending business his way. Mochrie gradually expanded it until he had a workforce of about 50 and up to 80 at its peak. He had progressive ideas regarding furniture making and applied for a registered design of his cabinets as an invention.

McKays was Sunshine. People came from far and wide to work there. When I was going to the Tech I would see workers ten deep walking along the road going to work. They used to have a train just for the McKay workers. They may have worked hard but they were well looked after because he was a pretty good employer. McKays blew a whistle when it was time to head off for work, and we could hear that at our place. When we heard that whistle we knew it was 6 o'clock.

Pennells[1] was a smelly old meat factory in Braybrook. We used to get a whiff of them whenever the wind changed. Tucker Box was also there but they ended up in Shepparton. There were a variety of skin scouring and by-products places between Footscray and North Melbourne, and you'd also get a whiff of them when you were on the train going to the city.

St Albans in the Forties and Fifties

St Albans was waiting for something to happen. Up to the late forties and early fifties St Albans was mostly paddocks. There was no local industry if you didn't have the farming land. There wasn't a big population, and a few men in the town probably caught the train to wherever they worked.

There was a Church of England in East Esplanade near the railway line. The Presbyterian church was on the corner of Circus East and Elaine Street. Mr Evans was the Presbyterian Minister and he used to come up from Sunshine in his old type Lizzie car[2]. I went to the Church of England for their Sunday school classes. Then when we were 16 or 17 the afternoon sessions suited us better, so we switched to the Presbyterian sessions. We used to have a dog that used to sit outside waiting for us. We'd try to send him home or lock him up before we left, but he'd always get out and follow us down. You might need one to safeguard you these days but you didn't need anybody then. Everybody knew everybody else and there weren't the drugs around. People had no money to get drunk if they wanted to anyway. They had too much to do thinking about their families.

It improved in the late forties and early fifties and then grew and grew.

[1] George Pennell and his son were operating a soap, tallow and fertiliser factory in Braybrook that had been reported on various occasions for its offensive odours; the business was one of the 'noxious trades' that Braybrook shire council was trying to regulate. George Pennell was also a shire councillor at Braybrook.
[2] The model T Ford was known as Tin Lizzie.

Everyone started to build and the houses came up like mushrooms. Prior to that you could sit on the railway station and look way over to the Pinnacle Estate – which had about 6 houses, and Mary Smith's place was one of them – and it was just a great expanse of paddock. I think it was good when people started arriving because things started to develop.

There were more opportunities for people to go to work, whereas the choice was very narrow before. There were apprenticeships for the guys, but there wasn't ever the factory work locally. Footscray had the cotton mills but a lot of girls travelled into town to find work. At my age they learnt millinery and dressmaking and they went to the city to work. Even the shops that were here were run by family members so there were few employment opportunities there.

Earlier, we had no chemists or anything. All of a sudden there are even doctors as well. You had to go to Sunshine before, and anything big you had to go to the city. Even Footscray didn't have the hospital for years. Now they have one in Furlong Road, which suits a lot of people.

There were a couple of mysterious deaths in St Albans. One was a drowning in the Theodore Street reservoir.[1] I think it was a family dispute where the wife shot her husband and ended up drowning herself.[2] I was at the Tech School when that happened. The other death mystery involved the body of a Sunshine man they found in the well near the old quarry; he was a businessman from McIntyre Road.[3] I think this was in the sixties. I think they got someone for that years later.

Beyond the Fifties

In 1951 I married a chap from Braybrook. His parents had a chook farm at first and then he had a garage along Ballarat Road, opposite where Kevin Dennis is now located. That was during the war years, and the garages weren't like they are now. His name was Kelvin Dodd and he was a well-

[1] This was a private reservoir on the corner of Theodore and Fox streets. It was originally built to supply water for the Padley property but later became subject to controversy and disputes about the public having access to the water. In the 1950s it was later taken over and filled in by Keilor council.
[2] The deaths of Alfred and Rose O'Neill occurred in March 1935.
[3] The body of Stanislaus Kaska was discovered in December 1959 and the police investigations and the coroner's inquest occurred in 1960.

known identity in Braybrook, but everybody knew him as Pat. After we married we lived in Ascot Vale, then we went to Maidstone, and finally we came to Toolern Vale because the brother lived here; he was a bachelor.
My brother Harold was 36 when he died of cancer in 1963. My mother died two years after he did. It was sad. My other brother never married, and my elder sister didn't have any children. My younger sister had a son, and he had an intellectually disability. When I married I decided I wasn't going to go through what my mother went through, so I never had children. That's why it's just me left of the original family.

My father's health deteriorated in the 1970s when he developed diabetes. He didn't know he had the condition so he wasn't receiving any treatment. It wasn't till he lost a couple of toes that he realised something major was wrong and by that time he had to have a leg amputated. He then got around quite well with crutches. By then he was on his own. He'd bach it during the week and I would come up on the weekend to do the cooking and help him with other things around the house. He died in 1976.


Clair Young née McAuley

My other brother, Finlay, contracted cancer in 1978, and survived only about two or three years after the condition was diagnosed. He left the property to me and my two sisters who were widows and couldn't drive cars, so it was no advantage for them to be here, so I bought out their share of the property. That's how my husband and I came to Toolern Vale.

My older sister, Clair, lived in Sunshine in Ballarat Road, and the younger one, Alma, in Kyneton, because her husband was from Kyneton. She moved here [Toolern Vale] for a while when her husband died, then moved back there. When Clair lived in Sunshine that was reasonably close so we could visit her. Kyneton wasn't so bad either, and we used to go up there once a week.

Then my husband died of a heart attack in 1999. Altogether I've been in Toolern Vale 20 years now. It's gone very quickly.

Marion Dodd née McAuley

JOHN STEVENS

James Henry Stevens came from the small rural community of Betley in western-central Victoria. In about 1907 he bought land in Main Road West where he established a farm. Though this was a move from a rural country region to the outskirts of Melbourne, it was still the case of "pioneering" farmers taking on the challenge of settling in a sparsely populated shire undergoing subdivision through the Closer Settlement scheme. This interview with John Stevens, son of James Stevens, was recorded in 2001.

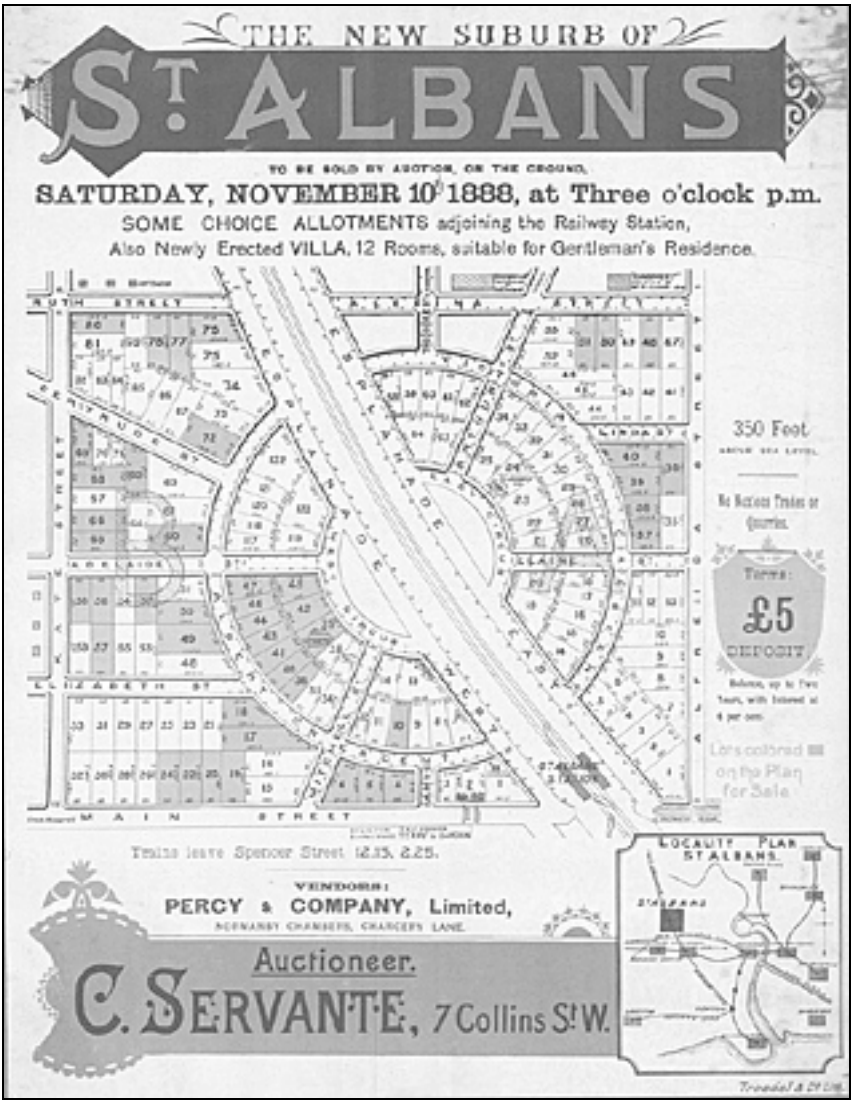
Can you tell me about St Albans in the early years?

John Stevens c.1950s

The story of the township of St. Albans might begin back in the 1890s with the land boom and the collapse that caused real devastation at the turn of the century. It was obviously a time when the government of the day thought they should provide blocks of land. If they were going to get people to the west of Melbourne they had to provide the blocks of land. These subdivisions were established with blocks of land say 66 by 132 feet. If an agent sold you a block of land in those days and you asked him two or three days later to take you back to show you the block of land, there's no surety that you'd be seeing the same block that you'd been supplied, because there were no roads, no water, there was no light - just paddocks. The subdivision marks would be at the back of the block. They'd be like a T. They'd dig a little bit of a gutter along in a T shape identifying that that was the back corner of the block. That seemed to remain that way right up to about 1935-36. These lots were still sort of pretty unsaleable because there were no people coming into the country to take them up.

In that era [c.1900] the government of the day had established the Closer Settlement Board for subdividing the huge holdings north of Melbourne. Those holdings close to the Melbourne area were subdivided into 300 acres, 200 acres, some of them 500 acres as they got further out. That's how the farming community was established. Most of the subdivided land of St. Albans from that time right up to about 1935 was in the east part of

the St. Albans that's opposite Errington Reserve. That went through right up Henry Street and Fox Street and right up the top there. They remained in that form for many years.



Source: Batten & Percy collection, State Library of Victoria

The Sheffield Estate[1] was full of that sort of blocks and there was an amount on the west side of St. Albans that went up near the old state primary school, crossed the end of Ruth Street and James Street before you got into the Stevensville Estate. That was the boundary, all the land through there. On the south of Main Road West from the station right through to Station Road Deer Park that's all land in those old subdivisions. Basically, St Albans was a farming community and I will later name some of the families who had holdings in St. Albans.

The most-used route into the city was Main Road East (we call it Main Road East today, it used to be Main Road[2]) onto McIntyre Road down to Ballarat Road and then into the city. I used to take sheep with a horse and cart, drive them through St. Albans down those roads and go along behind Kinnears and coming out there again and then down to Melbourne, to save three pounds in the cost of a truck. That's how poor people were in those days. I remember I bought some sheep and ewes when I started working on the farm. In those years I drove the ewes and lambs out starting at ten o'clock in the morning with a horse and cart, brought them out along Furlong Road and out along there because we had another 140 acres further down next to Sheffield Estate going out to Station Road.

Mum kept saying to Dad, 'When are you going to stop buying land?' This is the story I heard. He'd say, 'We might never see the benefit, but our sons will.' He died in 1946 and he never lived to see the fruits of his thinking.

The most gracious and philanthropic lady of St Albans was Mrs. Alice Errington, who lived in something of a mansion at the corner of West Esplanade and Albert Crescent. I don't know if that home is still there. It was a lovely big home. I think she might have come out from England, I'm not sure. She had a son called Bobby[3] who was a good photographer and took that photograph of our family when I was about five. When Bobby used to walk he would take about a metre and a half every step. He was only about five-foot tall but he took these huge steps. I can remember him by that. His mother was a wonderful woman. It was she who donated the reserve in Main Road East for use by the people of St. Albans. When she died my mother felt she'd lost a sister, such was their love for each other.

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[1] In 1955 Willmore & Randel were advertising land on the Sheffield estate from £64 per lot near the corner of St Albans and Furlong roads.
[2] It was initially known as Boundary Road.
[3] Robert William Errington was born in 1901 and died in 1973.

Amongst the stalwart families of the town were the Perretts who ran a grocery store in Main Road West, incorporating a news agency and a Commonwealth Bank agency. John Perrett and his wife Elizabeth came to St Albans in the 1920s with their son Eric. Eric took over the running of the business after his father died and also put in many years of service to the district. He married Effie Hughes and their son, John, established a pharmacy in Main Road West during the 1970s.

Oaten hay and sheep farming were the principle produce of the farming community. The families who were farming were the Andersons; they were probably one of the greatest hay growing families. The father grew 'em, and the son grew 'em. The father used to have horses in the Royal Melbourne Show and my older brother, Doug, used to ride the horses for him at the Show. He'd always come back with a prize, like a set of pencils and a pencil case, something like that. There were the Boyds,[1] they had a farm at the corner of Taylors Road and Sydenham Road but on the other side of the road from where I later had some land. They had a son Billy Boyd. He was a real character. He could make a bob when no-one else was making a bob.

When I went home to work on the farm I got a bit interested in cows. What set me going was I was attending Williamstown High School and I contracted pleurisy and bronchitis. The doctor said to my mother, 'The best thing you could do with this boy is to get him away to a hot climate.' My mum sent me out to my cousin's farm at a little place called Bet Bet on the other side of Maryborough. He had a dairy farm there. Although I had been reared on a farm I really detested it, because my job was to go out and cut the thistles. Mum would give me two shillings an hour to cut these thistles and I hated it. My love of the farm wasn't there at that point of time. Anyway, I went up there and I wrote to mum that 'I milked eight cows last night, I'm having a great time here.' I got a letter back about two days later: 'Come home, come home. We'll get a milking cow.' (laughs)

When I eventually got back home to work on the farm I got a little bit in with this Billy Boyd because I started to love cows through being up there. I loved to have a few cows and rear a few poddy calves. I remember that's how I had £85 in the bank as a young bloke. That was a lot of money in those days. It was all from milking these cows and separating the milk. Mum and dad used to cart the cream into town in a big stainless steel container.

[1] Jonathan and Emily Boyd's farm was on the north-eastern side of the railway line. They had five children: William (Billy), Annie, Dorothy, Eva and Myrtle.

Holdenson and Nielsen, who were in a big building in Flinders Street, used to take it for making butter.[1] That journey happened nearly every week.

This Billy Boyd had a bit of an influence over me. He didn't have a motor car; he used to drive this four-wheel wagon with a pole down the centre and a horse each side. You could hear this thing coming from miles away and you could hear it afterwards for miles in the other direction—clank, clank, clank. We went to Newmarket this day and I was thinking I'll buy another cow and with another cow I'll have three. This nice first-class heifer was knocked down to me. After you buy them you're allowed to take them around to a cow bale and test them. Anyway, I can hear Billy's voice now as he turned back to the stock agent in a loud nasal voice, 'You know Mr Logan that cow it's got one quarter no good!' (laughs) That was the end of the story there. We got in the wagon to come home and what do you think is in the back of the wagon? The cow. He got it for half price. (laughter)

Then there were the McRaes[2] along Taylors Road near Green Gully, while at the other end was Les King, of course from what is now known as the Kings Park estate. In between were the McAuleys[3] who used to be over near the new Keilor Plains railway station battling there and having a very, very hard life. There were the Calders who lived up on the corner of Station Road and Main Road West. That would be on the south-west corner of that intersection. They were a very nice family. They used to come to church in a sulky and occasionally if I was good I'd get a ride home from the church because they went past our way. I'd be tickled pink to have a ride.

Another fellow was Henry Griffiths. When you come out the end of Kings Road where it hits Taylors Road over on your left there was Griffiths' property. I used to go over there to dip the sheep. He made me so welcome and I came just to do the sheep! He couldn't be finer, a really lovely guy. Then there were the Sykes at Main Road West. The Milts and Foxes were at Taylors Road. The Colemans and Sicilianos were there. The people and times do impress a bit on the mind.

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[1] Holdenson & Nielsen, who were at 521-527 Flinders Street, Melbourne, were butter producers, dairy produce merchants and commission agents. They were involved in the processing and export of butter and dairy products.

[2] Farquhar and Annie Macrae's farm was north of Taylors Road from near Arthur Street to Green Gully. They had three children: Florence, Malcolm "Sonny", and Jean.

[3] North-west corner of Taylors Road and the railway line.

From 1900 to 1935 there was a low running economy effected by the depression. The population in 1936 was about 600. It was a pretty static over most of those years; it never went up and down. No-one came much to St. Albans and no-one left unless they died. The number attending the St. Albans State School (I remember the number of the school was 2969) varied up to about 96. It could be 90 to 96.

About 1934-35 there was an explosion at Deer Park Explosives.[1] We were sitting in the class; I was in the eighth grade I think. The explosion shook the whole school; it was quite a blast. That's why they had those compounds there around the explosives, a wall built around them.

The milk bar and small grocery store was started by Mr Lew Self, who used to be the manager at the quarry. He got hurt in an explosion that hit him in the face; he had a lot of blue bruising for a long time what I remember of him. He was a lovely guy, he really was. The money he got from that set him up in East Esplanade on the corner of Victoria Crescent. That's where he had a milk bar and he sold a few groceries. Later he developed that more into a grocery business. Then one of the nicest things happened. A popular wedding took place and that was the marriage of Alf Goddard, who was the oldest of the three boys, to Bernice Self.[2] I can see Alf in his courting days, even prior to their courting days. He always had a nice bike and he'd ride around and circle around the block on the corner that was vacant. He'd get down there and finally he'd go up and say he'd like to see Bernice. Bernice and all the members of that family all worked hard for their dad. The dad wouldn't have been able to build up the business if it hadn't been that the girls worked there.

There was only one petrol pump. I think there was another one down Main Road East run by the Hounslows who had a property there. During the war years if you got there on a Sunday the cars would be lined up right along there, waiting to get petrol out of one of these hand bowsers.

The marriage of Alf and Bernice was very popular. Everybody enjoyed that as well as their families. Alf was something of an engineer and he's the one who got building and was able to get put the steel together for that. He had a

[1] There were a number of major explosions at Deer Park. The one in March 1931 was said to have been felt 50 miles away. Two men were killed in an explosion in September 1945.
[2] 22 March 1947.

workshop at the back of his house and he did that before he was married. That's how they built the big store. The store that you see today is entirely different from what that big exterior was at the time. I believe they had the biggest supermarket - this is the early days of the supermarkets - and they had the biggest in the southern hemisphere for a while. I think so, but I'm not sure if I should be quoted on that. They built up a wonderful business there.

The Church of England and the Presbyterian Church were established pretty early [1910-12]. They were always there, if you like. For several years the Catholics met at the Mechanics Institute which was a public hall. The current church is a tribute to the builder Fred Barnard, who was a great builder and a friend of mine. He used to do a lot of building and I used to organise the finance for him, whether it was extension or alteration. There were not many new houses. The church is a splendid tribute to Fred and those families who supported the early Catholic congregation of St Albans, including the likes of the Gavaghans and Farrugias. They were very, very faithful contributors. They had their Mass there Sunday after Sunday after Sunday until, after sufficient migrants had come here and the Catholic flavour was increasing, they built their first church. It was facing Arthur Street but was in Winifred Street.[1]

The new Aussies were blokes like Bob Malewski. Old Bob taught me quite a bit of Polish to the extant that I used to count out the change for the new Australians when they came to buy their timber. When you're working out a house plan and I was working out the timbers for them as well as answering the phone, and as I'm counting the change I'm going '*jeden, dwa, trzy, cztery, pięć*.' [2] Old Bob used to come and he'd bring in a lot of customers, and all he could say to me when he saw me half the time was: 'What you tell Johnny? What you tell?'

The old subdivisions gave new birth to St. Albans as migrants from 1950 onwards advanced out into the west of Melbourne. Unimproved blocks of land despite a lack of all facilities—we could say no facilities—were rapidly taken up because of the low prices compared to the south-eastern suburbs. In those days everybody was going to the south-eastern region.

[1] The first church was on the corner of Winifred and Theodore streets and a new church was built on the corner of Arthur and Winifred streets. Years later the portion of the road between Theodore and Arthur streets was closed off at the western end and the eastern end was renamed Reis Street, after Fr Con Reis who was the first parish priest.
[2] Polish for *one, two, three, four, five*.

People came to St. Albans and saw so many rocks and the wind sweeping over the plains and thought no-one could live under those conditions.

Buying a part-house on these lots on convenient terms gave migrant families a base from which they would assume an Australian way of life. Blocks, which had been virtually unsaleable from the collapse of the land boom in the late 1890s right up to the Second World War, were regularly sought by migrants looking for a new start after their suffering in Europe.

For some years the Board of Works permitted trunk services from the water mains. There were a few mains along the arterial roads but if someone bought a block of land along Henry Street where there was no water, to give you an example, you could dig a trench about two feet deep, you put galvanised pipe along. If you put a big enough one in you could sell off the right to tap into that to someone else. That's the way things worked. I can remember as a kid when they put the mains along Main Road West. The sustenance workers dug the trench for the main. I can see the stones there and the wall of those trenches as they picked their way through and got that water out.

The SEC was quick to respond when there was demand for their service.

The years from 1950 to 1956 saw a great development by business houses and people migrating to St Albans and we started a timber yard as a family business in response to the renewed demand for housing.[1] Land in the old sub-divisions that were virtually unsaleable before the war (offered for as little as eight pounds a lot) increased to 750 pounds by 1960. My dad had in excess of a hundred lots.[2]

Before the fifties my father was trying to sell some of his blocks and had erected a big billboard in Footscray advertising housing land for sale in St Albans. But the demand just wasn't there at the time and after six months he hadn't sold even one block so he had a think about it and decided on new strategy. He put up a new poster across that billboard that said 'STILL A FEW LEFT'. And he still didn't sell any.

I remember when we finally started to sell these off. It's the thing that led me into being a real estate agent eventually. We had these lots and mum

[1] About 1954 the Stevens brothers established a timber yard and the hardware store in East Esplanade giving encouragement to families settling in the district.
[2] It may have been as many as 250.

didn't know much about them. Dad had died, but we knew where they were because we still had to pay the rates on them. Things were so bad that dad might pay half the rates, I remember that, and the other would remain swinging. I don't know how those things were managed at that time because everybody was just poor - poor, poor, poor. That's the way it was. He bought his farm from the Closer Settlement Board and he bought this farm over this way and he had all these lots. Mum would say, 'When are you going to stop buying this land?' He said, 'You and I may never see it.' That's the story, that's the way it went.

When I started selling I didn't know anything about titles, I didn't know anything about mortgages or anything at all. I remember a solicitor rang up saying there was a mortgage on a property and I didn't know how to answer him. It occurred to me in later years that it didn't matter what was owing per lot on those blocks of land, because we were getting so much for them then we were able to pay out the arrears and the interest and everything, because we had title for every one of them, no trouble at all. Title for every one! It was amazing.

By the sixties, town planning authorities took a positive attitude to the rapid building growth in St. Albans. The building of commercial premises in Main Road East and Main Road West had to be set back twenty feet from the front building alignment of the block, whereas before you could build a shop right up to that. That's why you have that in-and-out business in Main Road West in particular, how some of the shops are set back. The ones that are still sitting out, like the Slavonia Butchers and Kerr the Chemist's building, are the ones that were built before the new regulations came into force.

With the depression some twenty-five years behind, the time was ripe for a permit to subdivide the old farm into the new Stevensville Estate. Lot sizes were more commonly 50 by 150 feet, whereas the subdivisions in St. Albans in the late 1890s comprised of many lots of 66 by 132 feet, and sometimes more than 132 feet. There were still many of these large lots still available in St. Albans. By the early sixties Stevens Brothers had built another retail store between the old Mechanics Institute and Self Brothers in East Esplanade. Neither of these two large business premises is occupied by their families. It could be said that the headaches and the heartaches at the turn of the century from 1890 to 1910, which was lots of unimproved land in abundance but no takers, became the base for migrant development, particularly in St. Albans, to the joy of all concerned.

Can you tell me about your family?

James Henry Stevens c.1900

My father was James Henry Stevens, the son of a farming family; he was born at Bet Bet. They had their farm at Bet Bet, though it could have been Betley as they're adjoining towns.[1] Dad was an academic; he was born to study. I remember when I was going to Williamstown High School for four years and had to do many compositions. I never had to look up a dictionary for the meaning of a word: 'Dad, what does this mean?' He always had an answer. He'd always have his head in the paper or asking me to run over to Perretts to get the Argus in those days and bring it home for him to read. That was like being able to turn on our television these days. He was a lay preacher, a very religious man.[2] I only remember once him giving me a bit of a belting for something very naughty, because he wasn't that way. Mum would discipline you at the drop of a hat.

Dad was very highly respected. Although he was Jim Stevens, James H Stevens, everybody called him Mr Stevens. Not that he asked for it but they respected him for the person he was. He was a councillor for fifteen years at Keilor. He went to America to study and get his BA, which he got. He worked his passage on the ship over there. I don't know how long after he got back that he married mum. He used to teach a memory culture system[3] in Collins Street in Melbourne, and that's where he was able to earn a few bob. He was a great writer of poetry. He had some lovely poems in a book where he would write and quite often I would read his poetry. He wasn't cut out to be a farmer, that's for sure.

Dad was a very patient man. I never saw him cross at any time, never saw him do his block. The best thing he did for mum was to buy her a brand

[1] Other relatives believe that the farm was at Betley.
[2] James H Stevens studied at Butler University in America for his future work with the church. On his return he became the Evangelist at the Malvern Church of Christ. It was formed in 1889 and by 1900 had a congregation of over 200 members.
[3] He published "Full Memory Power and how to use it" in1906, a book about mnemonics.

new Model T Ford. I was born in 1923 and he got the Ford about 1924. It was compensation to my mum for me being a boy, because mum wanted a girl. That's how she got the T Model Ford.

As well as being a councillor for the shire of Keilor, he was a Justice of the Peace was with the school council for many years. He was always ready to work for the future of St Albans; he just loved the place.

My mum, Agnes, was a daughter of Mary and James Cockerell of Newmarket, and I think it was through the Church of Christ off Wellington Street in Newmarket that she met dad. Mum was a church organist and of course he [dad] was a preacher. Mum's mother just loved the fact that her daughter was going to marry a minister. They married in 1909 and she came out to St Albans on a steam train. At that stage there was a suburban steam train that would come in the morning, and in the evening the Bendigo Express would stop at the station, if requested, on its way to the city.

Mum always remembered when she first arrived in St Albans after getting married that the town looked no more that a small store and post office set amongst farm paddocks all round. She was well dressed for the occasion in a dress with train, pointed shoes and a picture hat, then had to walk the mile or so along Main Road West to her new home, the farmhouse.

She'd never done any cooking of consequence. The first thing that happened after she came to the farm was to be introduced to cooking for the farm workers. Dad had all this stacked hay and they had the thrashing blokes with their machines with fifteen or sixteen blokes all working this thing. The rain came down and of course the blokes couldn't work but they had to be fed. Their introduction to chopping up a side of lamb was mum's first experience in cooking for sixteen blokes. I can imagine what it was like.
There was no doctor in St Albans and if one had to be called Dr Adamson[1] would come from Sunshine in his horse and jinker; it could take him up to three hours to come out to the area.
At that stage the primary school had about 25 pupils being taught by Miss

[1] Dr John Adamson came to Braybrook in 1912 when he was appointed as the shire health officer and he also established a private practice. He left in 1933. In 1927, Dr Fisher from Sunshine was visiting St Albans every Tuesday afternoon for consultations at Mrs Magee's premises though it is not clear how long this lasted. In 1953 Dr Peter Frajman commenced practice in Main Road West but relocated to Altona in 1956. Dr Igor Balabin established his home and practice in Main Road East in August 1958.

Phillips, and later by Mr Morgan. Eventually my mother ended up being President of the Mothers Club for about 15 years. She was the President of the Benevolent Society in St. Albans, or the representative of the Benevolent Society in St. Albans, for many years. Anybody who came along with a real hard luck story she was always able to help them in some way. She became well known for that attitude. She used to run concerts in the Mechanics Institute in those days before the war. At one concert she raised eighty pounds, and that was an enormous amount as the take for one day. She was a member and supporter of many charitable organisations and activities over the years.


Agnes Stevens c.1930s

She had a wonderful ear for music; if she could hear a tune for a while she could sit down and play it. She played a lot of the accompaniments for my second brother, Doug, who had a glorious voice. She could transpose: she might be playing in the key of G and she could slide down and play that same tune in a lower key. She was enormously gifted. I learnt to play it too but I can't now because of arthritis. She read music, but more often than not she would play it without the music sheets. She had a beautiful ear. Sometimes I sit down on a Sunday morning and watch Songs of Praise. When a hymn comes on that I haven't heard before I can immediately sing the harmony for that, no trouble at all … I still play the electronic organ very sparingly.

Mum died in 1968. I couldn't say enough about my mother even though she was pretty fiery compared with dad. If I hadn't got the eggs and the chickens in at night time after school in readiness for the next morning, well look out - get in the back room, one smack on the bottom. The next time it happened, two. The next time it was, 'How many did I give you last time?' (laughs)
Mum was a very strict disciplinarian, the exact opposite to Dad, but they were a beautiful combination.

Dad fell into ill health about 1940. Mum and I nursed him and I came home to work the farm because there was no one else to do it. Between 1940 and 1946 he was increasingly sick. He had Parkinson's disease; that was his main complaint. What made it hard to look after him was he would

wake in the middle of the night. The boys and dad slept in the sleepout, the older brother had gotten married but Doug and I were still there. Dad would wake in the middle of the night dreaming and acting out that he was driving the horses. This would go on for night after night. When it came to the morning we would be completely exhausted. Other times people would come and say, 'Oh Mrs. Stevens, do you know Mr. Stevens is on the road to Deer Park?' He got increasingly bad. He didn't deserve that, but he could have been worried about all these things he'd bought and couldn't pay for. Whether that worried him or not, but you wouldn't know.[1]

My brothers were older than me, I'm the youngest.

Garfied, Douglas and Horace Stevens c.1920s

Gar [Garfield] was the eldest of the boys. He went to Sunshine Tech for a while. He had a wonderful aptitude for working in steel, sheetmetal in particular; he had just a natural instinct for it. I can remember after we got the water laid on the farm he did something revolutionary. He cut a 44-gallon drum in half from top to bottom, opened it up that way, welded the

[1] James Stevens died on 23 December 1947. He had lived in St Albans for about 40 years and had served on the Keilor Shire Council for 16 years.

two parts together and made a little stand for it. He ran a galvanised iron pipeline from the house through the yard up behind the sheds, through the stockyard out into the paddock, and into the drum. There he put a ball valve on it so the stock could have water.

After he'd left the farm and I took over the things he was doing. I had a lot to learn. The old binder that they'd been cutting the hay with for years was starting to get a bit on the nose and he got the parts when they were necessary. I worked with him and saw how he did things and gradually, surely but slowly, I got to learn how this thing would work. The only thing that beats me on the farm machinery now is the knotter. If the knotting machine won't tie I'm not sure what to do.

Gar was a real goer and an organiser, very capable, and a very, very competent man. He could turn his hand to anything. He was very good in tinsmith working. He worked very hard on the family farm, and for nothing really. I had about ten years for nearly next to nothing. Gar married Flora McRae. I think the McRaes were a branch of the Sonny McRae family[1] who used to own the property in Taylors Road on the bend going around where the lights are, that land in there. After Gar got married he of course left the farm. He had to get a job to get some money for his new life. He ended up becoming the manager at Torin Electrics, which was a branch of Braemar. We knew the owner of Braemar because his wife was a great friend of my mother's and they often used to come and see my sister-in-law.

We lost another brother, that was Horrie [Horace], who drowned. That was a bit of a mystery. I don't know the complete story because I was too young. He drowned in the Yarra River near Queens Bridge in January 1940. It affected my father very much. He'd never talk about it but I'm sure he was suffering inwardly.

Horrie was great on sport. He'd played full back for the North Melbourne seconds. He really couldn't get into the firsts because in those days it was dominated by the Catholic Leaguers in the club, and not everyone was a Catholic. There was a Tommy Fitzmorris, a big ruckman in the game they were playing against Footscray on a Saturday afternoon. Horrie said to me to get into the ground at quarter time and just give Tommy the message, 'I hope he does it well today,' and to tell him I was Horrie's brother. I did that.

[1] Flora McRae was the daughter of John McRae of Sydenham. These comments suggest there was a connection between the Sydenham and St Albans families.

Fitzmorris got a bit of a shock. He was one of the longest kicks in football and he had an enormous spring when marking. Once he hit a cricket ball from the pitch in the middle of Errington Reserve into the tennis court and even then it was on the full. Football was Horrie's love and after he left League he played with ICI. He was a beautiful footballer.

Doug [Douglas] came along, and his great talent was singing. He had a beautiful tenor voice. He used to sing at the P and A Parade on 3KZ and Margot Sheridan used to be the accompanist. Most times he wanted his mother to do that because she knew all the tunes and his style. He sang once on one of the talent competitions. There used to be a critic called Slapper who would comment on the various ones who attended the competition. He'd give them a mark out of ten. It had never been done before to our knowledge but he gave Doug ten out of ten. What he used to do, he could sing Richard Tauber, Josef Schmidt, Krupps and others. He could sing them.

When he was a kid he always had his head in the earphones of the crystal set and enjoyed tuning to where he could hear these tenors. He had a glorious, glorious voice. Of the three of us he would probably be the playboy. He liked life, liked getting the best out of every day. That's the way he lived his life.

Did your brother make any recordings?

No, not that I remember. He loved the personal presentation. He used to get jobs like singing at the theatres in St Kilda at the Capitol. He wanted me to go with him this time. Anyway, the boss there wouldn't let him on because he came fifteen minutes late. Whether it was to teach him a lesson I don't know, but he never sang that night. He always could get away with stuff. I remember one night he's got this flat tyre. Here he is with his nice black jacket on and the tails and everything else is just fine. Anyway, he got talking to this fellow that came walking down the street. To cut a long story short, the bloke ended up changing the wheel. You couldn't get annoyed with him for what he would do. Everybody liked him. Of all of us boys I think he was the most liked. He always went along with things as they were.

The last one is my little self. What can I say? Music was my hobby even though I never got to a great standard of playing it. I loved it. I used to sing quite a bit. As a matter of fact I did the tenor solos in the Crucifixion of Christ on Calvary when I was 74, at St. Johns. That was very unusual for

me. I didn't think the voice would come back. With a bit of practice it's amazing how the voice gets going. But It's getting very croaky now.

If your father was from Bet Bet, what was his motivation to come to St. Albans?

James H Stevens

He came from a farming family and one of his other brothers had a hay and corn store up there. That was the background of the family and that was the sort of thing he strove for above his academic learning. The hay and that sort of thing was in his veins. We used to cut a lot of chaff at the old home (that has just been pulled down now). Even I could sense it when I started to handle the hay. If I had a couple of sheaths under each arm to build up some stooks … it was glorious smelling that hay. You could feel it, it was in the veins. It was the same with Gar, but not with Horrie and Doug.

I think dad was pretty astute but no one recognised that because he didn't impress his friends as a businessman. He knew what he was about, because this farm was only twelve miles from Melbourne. He didn't know - we didn't know, nobody knew - what was going to bring about the value, and that became an enormous worry. It was the migration after the war that did the trick, but that was much later.

I remember we had to pay £123 a year to the Closer Settlement Board. Of the £123, about £120 was interest and £3 on the principle. You can imagine it was a heck of a trek, but all my dad had on his mind was as long as he could hang out he would, because if he didn't see the benefit his sons would. I would say that he might have heard that through the Closer Settlement Board the land was being released and maybe that was an opportunity for him. I can't be sure because that was well before I was born.

Was he born in Australia or overseas?

He was born in Australia, in Bet Bet, which is near Maryborough in north-western Victoria. He taught a memory culture system in the city in Collins Street, that's was what he was cut out for, but this feeling that he had to do

more than that was in the blood. After we sold our farm the first thing I did was to buy a farm up in Taylors Road. I wish I had it now, it's just been sold for subdivision. It's in your veins to have a bit of ground. Of course in those days it was so cheap. I can't tell you how poor people were, including my family. I remember my job in the morning was to go down and get the Argus. After a few years that this went on Mr. Perrett started to send out accounts for the paper. We wondered what had hit us. Paying for the paper! We'd been getting the paper for years. I didn't know as a kid and had been getting the paper for years and never ever paying for it. I imagine he did that in the hope of enticing some business in the groceries. Mum used to deal a lot with Selfs.

You were saying some of the farmers were just scraping a living.

Yes, but some of them were just a whisker better than the others. That Anderson family always seemed to be a little more comfortable that the rest of the farmers as far as I can remember. The eldest boy Fred Anderson eventually bought 140 acres up in Taylors Road, and eventually more by accident than design I bought 200 acres next door to him. His son was share farming that 200 acres and it was all under fallow when I first inspected it. I ended up buying the land.

Fred loved to do things right and straight and never bought anything new if he could patch up the old system. He used to drive four horses in a two-furrow plough from Taylors Road right down to the Kororoit Creek. That was the length of his property. It wasn't very wide but it was long. You could go past there when the paddock was half-ploughed and look down there and the furrow was straight as a rule, round after round. When he built a haystack it was square and the walls were straight and he could thatch a roof. One of the few farmers who could thatch a roof. The sample he used to cut for chaff … We used to cut and we were really in competition, but you couldn't compete with them.

Because the son was working at the mill in Sydenham he knew all the tricks of how to get the best sampling, how to treat your hay. We used to work with steamers and things like that. We used to have to water ours down layer by layer to get the hay soft and leave it to steam for a few days and it was just nice to cut, but it was a harder way of doing it. No-one could match that Fred Anderson for the quality of his work.

The boy Arthur[1] was said to be a dud at school. When he left school the head master said he's no good at school at all. One of the first things Arthur did after leaving school was dismantle the engine of an old International tractor they had there, put new rings in it, and then reassemble it. You have to admire the skill and confidence in doing that. I had a lot to do with him. We lived next door and we were great mates. If you were driving off an engine with a pulley that size and you've got a pulley on the machine you're driving, to run that at such-and-such a speed, how big a pulley would I need to have on there? Within seconds he would tell you. Anything to do with implements he was good at. He lived a saddish life in a way - the parents couldn't let go and he couldn't let go the parents. One of those situations.

I've heard some of the local farm produce won prizes at agricultural shows.

Yes, I would say the Andersons would have been amongst that, because they were really winning some prizes with their horses too. Doug used to come home with prizes, but they were mainly from the horses and Mr. Peter Anderson was the farmer. Horrie Anderson died only a few years ago. He used to live in that house that protruded out into Taylors Road, that weatherboard that was up the end there near the end of Theodore Street. He was the third son. Then there was Keith Anderson who had a farm up in Taylors Road on the other side from where I was. He was up there for years.

I'll never forget Keith was going by on his bike one day along Taylors Road as I was working there. I had six horses in a team ploughing up a paddock, about a forty acre paddock opposite Les King's place, right on the corner of Taylors Road and Kings Road. This day I was a bit tired and I stopped the horses about half-way down the furrow, and I walked across the clods and was looking at the job the machine had done at this stage. Keith went by on his bike and yelled out, 'Why don't you get on the bloody thing and make it go!'

He used to have six horses in the team and he'd be up at eight o'clock in the morning and be working until six o'clock at night. All you could see was the outline of those horses and him as the sun went down. I used to like giving mine a rest now and again. I wasn't brought up to that; I had to learn that when I went working full-time.

[1] Arthur Frederick Anderson was born on 11.2.1927. He finished at St Albans Primary School in 1940 and then worked on the family farm.

When you are farming sometimes to get an extra bob you'd go and work for another farmer if it was harvest time. On one occasion I was doing some work with big Clarrie Harry. He had hands on him as big as that and if he had his back to a wall he could fight three or four men at a time.

Clarrie was a sort of temporary manager at a farm in Sydenham at harvest time. I got a job there handling the hay. They had a fellow building the haystack there that didn't really know the job at all. They had built a little round stack and there was no-one capable of putting a roof on it. Jack McRae was Gar's wife's brother. Jack had worked with me on a farm when we were stacking. He said to Clarrie, 'Try that little Johnny Stevens, he'll put a roof on that for you.' They had an elevator and I've never worked on an elevator. Any-way, I put a roof on that and I've never built a roof like that since. I can still see it.

The Stevens brothers started a wood yard from the farm in Main Road West.

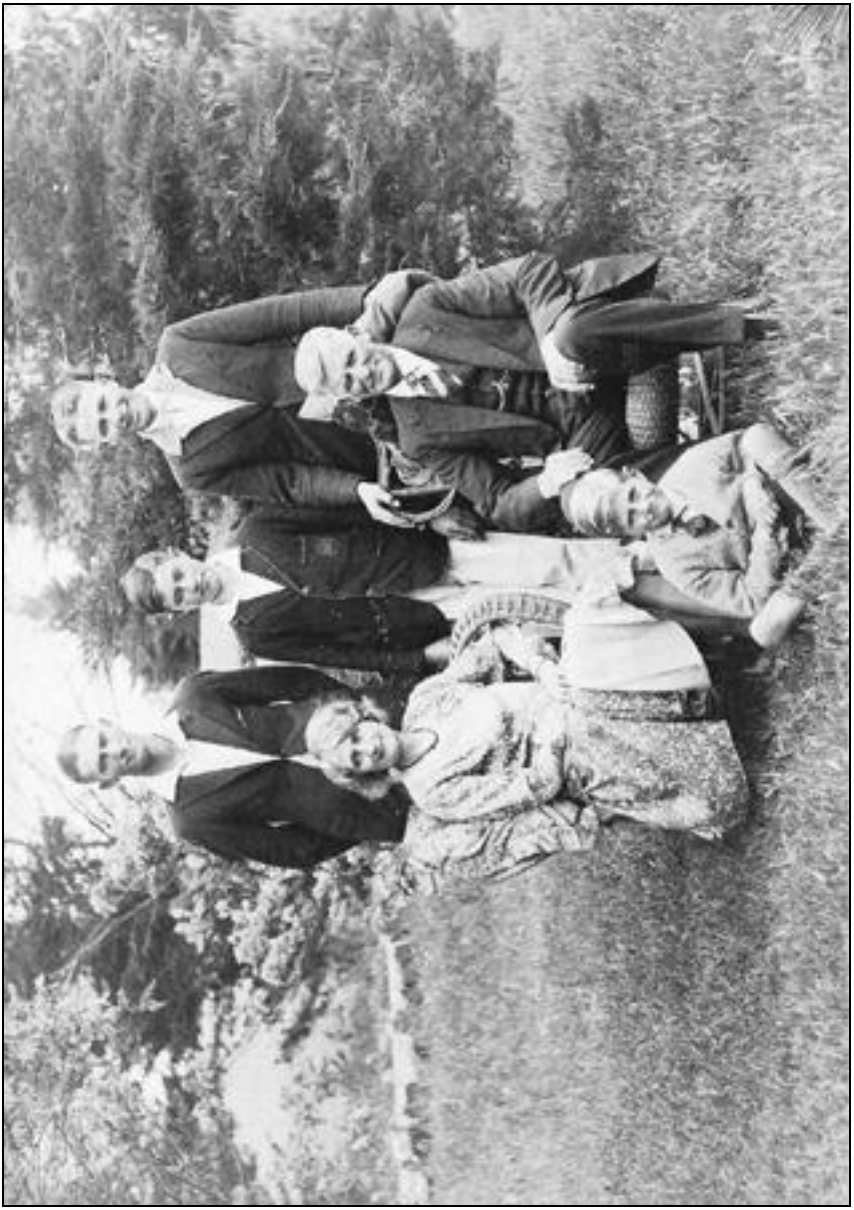
I sold that farm after nineteen years, next to that lump of land that used to be the boundary between the Shire of Melton and Keilor. Would you ever have imagined the speed of the development that is happening at Sydenham now, especially on the Keilor-Melton Road?

To see that area now, it's just full of houses in such a short time, it's funny.

John Stevens, 2001[1]

[John was born in 1923 and passed away in 2005.]

[1] Some excerpts from this article were included in the publication "St Albans, Oral History from the Tin Shed Archives", 2004.



The Stevens family, 1930s

John Perrett (third from left) with John Stevens (fifth from left) at a social function. June Stevens is seated on the far right, front row.

SELF BROS & GODDARD

The family

The ancestors of the Self family migrated from Wiltshire, England, in 1857. George Lewis Self and Alice Emma Chappel married in 1888. Their son, Lewis George Self (who would later settle in St Albans) was born in 1889 at Footscray. Self senior was a builder and the son became a carpenter. George and Alice were initially living in Clive Street Footscray [c.1903-1909] then moved to 609 Barkly Street Footscray [c.1914-1931].

On August 1911 Lewis George married Marion Grace Trudgen, who was also born in Footscray. Between 1914 and 1919 they were living at 385 Barkly Street Footscray. Lewis was working as a carpenter during that era, so it is likely that he took on his father's trade and probably worked with him, which was a common work practice in that era.

It was a time when Australia was following the rest of the world into the big depression and in the aftermath of the First World War the local economy was not bright. People didn't have the money to build or buy housing and the building trade was in severe depression. In the early twenties Lewis and Marion were registered as being farmers in Anakie Road Geelong and also in Labertouche, which is in Gippsland. Marion had family connections to both Geelong and Labertouche and she might have gone to stay with relatives for the birth of her first children. Then in March 1928 two of the children, Norman and Dorothy, were registered at the St Albans Primary School with their previous school being listed as Tottenham, so it is likely that the family had moved back to West Footscray or Tottenham prior to Mr. Self taking up employment in St Albans. Therefore, Lewis and Marion's three girls and three boys grew up predominantly as St Albans residents.

Lillian Margery (known as Margery) was born in 1912. In March 1940 she married Percy Edward Johnson, who had started an ice works in Maidstone. Margery died in 1968.

Edna May was born in 1915 and died in St Albans. She had a congenital heart condition which eventually claimed her life in 1951, aged 36. She and Marge started in the first shop that they took over from Mrs. Magee.

Dorothy Bernice (always called Bernice) was born on 3 July 1922 and studied Domestic Arts at Footscray. She started in the family business at

the age of 16 and ended up in charge of the registers. Bernice was also a qualified music teacher (ALCM, LLCM) who taught many youngsters the love of music through piano and prepared them for the London College of Music examinations. She was an accomplished pianist and voluntarily accompanied the local callisthenics club for 20 years. She married Alf Goddard in 1946. They had four children: Heather, Bronwyn, Sandra and Andrew. Alf died in 1964 from a heart attack whilst water skiing near Raymond Island. Bernice died in 2003 in a nursing home on the Gold Coast.

Norman Douglas was born on 28 February 1917 at Labertouche and was affectionately known as 'Nobby' to many. After primary school he worked at the quarry with his father and then worked at I.C.I. Deer Park. He enlisted in the army in 1939 and is included in the St Albans Roll of Honour. Norman joined the family business after returning from serving six years in the A.I.F. on active service. His role in the shop was management of stores and deliveries. He married Eileen 'Eily' Pyle and they had four children: Jeffrey passed away in infancy, twins Brenda and John were born in 1951, and Lesley was born in 1953. Norman died in 1973 and Eily in 2004.

Dudley Lewis was born on 16 September 1926 and went to Sunshine Tech. After Dudley left school he joined his father in the business but he continued with carpentry classes at night school. Dudley's role in the store was to make sure it was properly stocked and ran efficiently. He married Betty O'Hare. They had five children: Colin, twins Phillip and Maxwell (who died as a toddler), Susan and David. Dudley died in 1982. As a unusal coincidence, Dudley, Norm and Marge all died at the age of 56!

Lance Hartley was born on 3 June 1930 and went to Williamstown High. He married Shirley Isobel Greig and they had three children: Elizabeth, Anthony and Rhonda. Lance was the youngest son and also worked in the store after completing a business course. He took on responsibility for the office and staff. Lance and Shirley retired to the Gold Coast, then Raymond Island and later Wodonga where they later died. Lance died in 2010.

The thirties

Lewis and Marion Self and their children came to St Albans in 1928 because Lewis had obtained employment as the manager of the St Albans quarry. The former quarry manager was arrested in February 1928 for embezzling money, and the company would have recruited a new manager as soon as possible to oversee their business operations.

The marriage of Lewis George Self and Marion Grace Trudgen, 1911

Self's General Store in East Esplanade, 1930s.

It wasn't long before Lewis became involved with local concerns by joining the St Albans Progress Association. By October 1930 he was already on the committee with longer-term members such as Messrs. Luxford, McKechnie, Dickson, McRae, and Cox. At this stage Mr. Luxford had been chairman of the Association for about 20 years and he was re-elected unanimously for his great work.

It later years Lewis Self would be elected as chairman of the Progress Association and through this position helped shape local developments, especially in lobbying for the provision of basic but essential infrastructure requirements such as roads, electricity and reticulated water. He was also with the Auxiliary Fire Brigade and was vice-president of that for a while.

Then unexpectedly in November 1930 Lewis Self was the victim of an explosion at the quarry. He had been carrying out blasting operations in the quarry when a charge exploded prematurely. He was admitted to the Melbourne Hospital in a critical condition from burns to the side of the body and a fractured arm. He lost sight in one eye and never fully recovered from his injuries. Later he also developed diabetes, which the family believed was due to the shock from the accident. The St Albans quarry had had a number of accidents over the years and unfortunately a number of workers had been seriously injured, some having to have limbs amputated, and some dying as a result of their injuries. Lewis was lucky to survive.

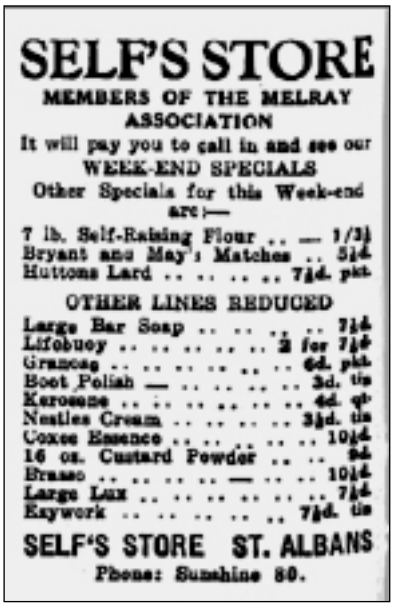
In 1931 Lewis and Marion were still listed as living at the St Albans quarry. People remember that he could not go back to his former work and that it took him about two years to recover. After that stage his address was given as East Esplanade so he was obviously no longer living on the quarry premises. However, he must have maintained some connection with the quarry until it closed down in late February 1935, because in April 1935 he advertised three of the quarry's draught horses for sale; he was probably helping with relocating the animals.

In mid 1932 while Mr. Self was still recovering from the accident, the two older girls, Margery and Edna, took over the little mixed business that had been run by Mrs. Magee over the previous decade. This was a small weatherboard shop in Main Road West near Mr. Perrett's store and was known as "the lolly shop" but also sold biscuits and cake, tobacco and cigarettes, as well as sandwiches and a cup of tea. Marge and Edna set about to supplement the family income by taking over and stocking the shop with home made cakes, pies, etc, anything to attract local trade. This

was the family's first commercial venture in the district and the experience gained would be invaluable for their future success.

The thirties was a time of growing optimism in St Albans because of an improving economy. Some of the workers recruited for the factories in Albion and Sunshine established their homes around Percy Street because more frequent rail services meant better access to work in the expanding industrial areas. By the mid thirties the local population had reached about 600 so there were business opportunities for those willing to take the risks.

Mr. Self purchased one of the vacant houses from the Pinnacle estate and relocated it to a site he had purchased in East Esplanade opposite the railway station. The carpentry skills that Lew Self had developed earlier were put to good use as their first shop in East Esplanade was built by him with help from friends and his son Norman. Here he established a small milk bar and grocery store selling a variety of commodities. St. Albans now had the luxury of being able to buy ice creams and those very new one penny ice blocks. One story from the era is of Bernice Self collecting ice creams from the Peter's factory on the other side of town and bringing them back in dry ice containers on the train. Another one is of the Self women having to get up in the middle of the night to stir and refreeze the ice cream that they were making to sell in the shop the next day.



SELF'S STORE

MEMBERS OF THE MELRAY ASSOCIATION

It will pay you to call in and see our WEEK-END SPECIALS

Other Specials for this Week-end are:—

7 lb. Self-Raising Flour .. — 1/3½
Bryant and May's Matches .. 5½d.
Huttons Lard .. .. 7½d. pkt.

OTHER LINES REDUCED

Large Bar Soap .. .. 7½d.
Lifebuoy .. .. 2 for 7½d.
Granose .. .. 6d. pkt.
Boot Polish — .. .. 3d. tin
Kerosene .. .. 4d. qt.
Nestles Cream .. .. 3½d. tin
Coxes Essence .. .. 10½d.
16 oz. Custard Powder .. .. 9d.
Brasso .. .. — .. .. 10½d.
Large Lux .. .. 7½d.
Enzwerk .. .. 7½d. tin

SELF'S STORE ST. ALBANS

Phone: Sunshine 80.

In those days it was not permitted to sell tobacco or groceries after 6 o'clock in the evening so the shop was divided in two to overcome this problem. The hand-operated Plume petrol pump was purchased from Mr. Hounslow, who had a small woodyard and a cabinet making business around the corner in Main Road East. The pump was installed on the footpath in front of the store and Sunday was the busy day for people coming to buy their petrol. But having the only local supply of petrol (the nearest other pump was three miles away in Sunshine) meant that the family was sometimes woken from its sleep to help someone who had unexpectedly

run out at an inconvenient time.

Business was improving, as was Mr. Self's health as the years were going by. It was decided to build a separate shop for groceries, with the addition of some kitchen hardware and accessories, and keep the other one for a larger more modern confectionery shop.

Lew Self became involved in community activities with other local leaders. In the thirties he was a member of the primary school committee thus sharing interests with the likes of James Stevens and Mrs. Agnes Stevens, and he became involved with the Mechanics Institute and the Progress Association. Through these groups he worked on campaigns to improve the water, roads and electric lights for the neigbourhood.

The forties

In the forties Lewis Self was President of the Mechanics Institute and Free Library. This organisation had been operating for many years but in December 1942 it was unanimously decided to hand over the deeds and management of the hall to the Keilor Shire Council. This action was moved by another committee member, Councillor Jolly, and it was regarded as being in the best interests of the area because the existing committee had had great difficulty in carrying on. The transfer of responsibility to the Keilor shire meant that the hall would be properly maintained and continue to function as a community facility. Its role expanded in the fifties when it was used as classrooms because the primary school could not accommodate the hundreds of children that had arrived with their immigrant families.

During 1944, as President of the St Albans Progress Association, Self became particularly active tackling the problems of the electricity supply. The Association's negotiations with the State Electricity Commission regarding the local electric service resulted in Lew Self being appointed as an agent to the Commission so that all local problems and complaints could be quickly reported for action. Residents were asked to notify Mr. Self immediately of any defect in the service. Complaints about street lights not working was a typical problem reported.

As well as these 'parish pump' concerns there were other, weightier matters. The Association held monthly meetings and effectively functioned as a local government ginger group. Councillors who represented the area would report about recent Council meetings and the actions that were

being taken with regard to the Association's requests, such as street repairs being referred to council estimates.

In 1945 many discussions were held about ways of further developing the district and even a lengthy business paper occupied members' attention regarding housing and sewerage. The Progress Association had been writing to the Housing Commission regarding the construction of homes in the district, resulting in one of those imponderable and irresolvable bureaucratic impasses: the Housing Commission would not proceed with any building scheme until the area was sewered, and the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works would not provide sewerage to the district until there were more houses built.

The forties was also a decade when the Self children extended the family boundaries. On 23 March 1940, Lillian Margery Self married Percy Edward Johnson in the St. Albans Presbyterian Church. It truly was a family affair, because the bridesmaids were Edna and Bernice Self, both sisters of the bride. The previous year Percy's older sister, Annie Johnson, had married Marion Self's younger brother, William Trudgen.

Then on 22 March 1947, Bernice Self married Alf Goddard, eldest son of the late Mr. A L Goddard and Mrs. Goddard of West Esplanade, St Albans.

The marriage of Alf Goddard and Bernice Self, 1947

Bernice was attended by her sister, Edna, and Betty Goddard, sister of the groom. Alf was supported by his brothers, Alan Goddard as best man, and Norman Goddard as groomsman. The wedding reception was held at the Mechanics Institute where about 150 friends and relatives wished the newlyweds all happiness. Alf joined the family business and the business name was changed to Self Bros & Goddard. Alf was a very clever engineer and a great asset on joining the business. He helped build the larger shops and had the ability to design and build the escalators. Bronwyn, Sandra and Andrew Goddard have very fond memories of riding up the escalator to the storeroom above and playing up there. They also remember working in the shop on holidays and weekends. They were encouraged to work hard, treat all customers with respect and in doing so they developed a good work ethic.

The original Goddard family had arrived in St Albans in the mid twenties when it was only a semi-rural area with a few shops; at that stage they were living in West Esplanade. Alf was one of five children the others being Joan, Alan, Norman and Betty. Alf became well known as a local tennis player and a Sunshine footballer. Over time he was secretary of the St Albans Tennis Club, secretary of St. Albans State School, and also served as a member of the St Albans High School Advisory Council.

In 1948 Lewis Self nominated as a candidate for the casual vacancy in Maribyrnong Riding of the Keilor Council caused by the resignation of Cr. Jolly; this riding represented the St Albans area. Running against him were a couple of other well-known residents: Bert Moffat,[1] who was a local butcher and popular through his sporting activities, and Claude Cox,[2] who was the local Labor candidate. Despite Self's good work in the district his ambitions for local council were not successful because Bert Moffat won the outright majority of votes. The following year, with the support of a local committee, Self again nominated for election when Councillor Moffat's term expired, but Moffat won another term. Ill health and the death of his daughter, Edna, who died at the age of 36, were probably the deciding factors in Lew's not re-nominationg.

During the forties Self's General Store was already affiliated with the Melray Association of stores with Lewis George as a 'grocer and produce

[1] Clarence Herbert "Bert" Moffat was known as a local cricketer and footballer.
[2] Claude Cox had a barber and tobacconist store on the corner of Main Road and West Esplanade.

merchant' selling goods such as wood, coal, coke, petrol, oil, hardware, Kodak supplies, crockery, paints and even supplying ice and school requisites. The little shop was definitely expanding.

The fifties

The war had ended and St Albans was experiencing a population surge as European migrants discovered the western suburbs. They were attracted by the affordable housing (one element of which was the Keilor Council's approval of building 'half houses' with a sunset clause for completion) and work opportunities in nearby suburbs. This was the post-war migration era and the Selfs and Goddards catered for this by building shop number three, their biggest. In September 1952 their application to build a shop and dwelling in East Esplanade was amended to permit the building of a self-service shop, and the application was approved.

Bernice and Norman's wife, Eileen[1], carried on in the old shop with the help of a few friends while the boys helped their father build a much bigger store. It was the first of its kind in the area, a self-service supermarket with six register outlets. Alf Goddard was instrumental in the design and the construction of this, their largest venture. Alf's children remember well their father making the large metal letters that formed the large SB & G sign. The sign became iconic in St Albans.

In 1955 the St Albans Progress Association noted that the suburb was growing rapidly. In 1950 the population was only 850, but by late 1953 there were 5,500 people: 'Since the last census there has been an average of three families every two weeks coming into the area, that means that amenities, schools, etc, must be enlarged and existing playing fields, parks and gardens, etc, must be closely guarded.'[2]

In 1958 Marion Self succumbed to diabetes and died. She had been a strong and much-respected matriarch and was loved and missed by her family and friends.

The sixties and beyond

In January 1964, Alf Goddard's sudden death while holidaying at Raymond

[1] Norman and Eileen were always known as Norm and Eily.
[2] St Albans Progress Association, May 1955.

Island shocked the family and the larger St Albans community. He was 42. He was given one of the biggest funerals ever in St Albans with several hundred people attending the service in St Albans Church of England with 140 cars following the cortege to the Western Suburbs Crematorium.

Though Mr. Self was now in his seventies he never ever fully retired. Self Bros & Goddard was still a family business, and as the business grew the staff grew to 60 consisting of all nationalities. Despite increasing frailty he was still taking an interest in staff and store and never refused help in any way if it was in his power to do so. In his latter years it was a common sight to see him in his wheelchair checking that all was running smoothly and often in a lively debate with Elsa Fry, a long-term and valued employee. He died in 1966 at the age of 77.

The St Albans population was still growing so a larger extension to the supermarket was deemed necessary. The family applied for and were granted a liquor licence, the pet food shop adjoining their shop being converted into the liquor store and adjoining properties in Victoria Crescent purchased for parking and extensions. They also added a second level, with the top storey being used for stores, offices and a staff dining room. At that time it was the largest independent self service supermarket in Australia, with the largest refrigeration area in Australia. It featured a built-in butcher shop, general groceries, green grocery, as well as sweets and cakes, but it specialised in continental foods. An article in the Herald newspaper stated Self Bros & Goddard had the largest range of continental foods and was the most popular delicatessen in Melbourne. People travelled for miles to shop there. The 'new Aussies' to St Albans embraced SB & G as their own as the family extended the range of goods to meet their culinary needs.

The third generation of Self and Goddards was joining the firm: Dudley's sons, Colin, Phillip and David; Norm's son, John; Lance's son, Anthony; and Alf's son, Andrew. The wives and daughters worked part time.

The staff grew to 100 consisting of many nationalities and was a very important factor for the St. Albans economy. Many of the staff served over twenty years, some being Jessie Priest, Peggy Cosgrove, Elsa Fry, Peter Searle, Marg Parsons, Kevin Missen, Elaine Sims, and Ray Beukman. Maria Bajzik had one assistant when she started the deli section in 1956 and saw it grow to twenty staff when she retired in 1979. John van Liempd joined the store at the age of 14 and was still working there thirty years

later. He recalls that in its heyday the store was so busy that it operated four vans to cater for the twelve hundred home deliveries per week.

Until then, the store was managed by six of Lew and Marion's grand-children – Andrew, Anthony, Colin, David, Phillip and John – who were responsible for its day-to-day operations. The supermarket was sold to the SSW organisation in 1988. At that stage it had 100 employees and was one of the largest and busiest in the St Albans area, having survived growing competition from chain stores such as Dickens-Coles and Safeways. For many people it was the end of an era in St Albans. After 53 years of operations as a family concern the last family member to manage the supermarket was Andrew Goddard, a grandson of the founder.

Reminiscing in the new millennium

The following reminiscences were added by family members of the original Self and Goddard partnership to provide a more personal background to the potted history included above. Brenda Payne is the daughter of Norman and Eileen Self. Gudrun is married to Andrew Goddard. Bronwyn Frazer and Sandra Beaver are daughters of the late Alf and Bernice Goddard.

Brenda

I don't remember the first little old shop that my grandparents had established, but I remember them building the new shop. My grandparents were Lewis and Marion Self. The spelling of the surname has changed over time. Originally it was 'Selfe' but at some stage the last 'e' was dropped off to the now more common usage of 'Self', but both spellings appear in the family history. 'Lewis' is a family name that is regularly featured amongst the men, but it comes from the maiden name of one of the female ancestors way back and since then her name has been remembered through every generation. The latest 'Lewis' is Lewis Lauricella who is Dudley Self's grandson.

My earliest memories of St Albans are about all the gumboots lined up at the station where people had taken off their boots before boarding the train. When they got off the train they'd put their gumboots back on and walk home. It was so muddy and though I don't remember the mud I do remember the gumboots at the railway station.

I remember the ice trucks in our back yard because dad used to do the ice

round. We used to hide things in there that we didn't want mum to find. There are so many good stories about the shop, including one of grandpa sitting in his chair at the shop door and if he thought anyone was stealing he would drag them back in with his cane.

Our house was in Victoria Crescent where the supermarket car park is now located. My mother's parents Tom and Annie Pyle lived next door and I remember going in the back gate to their house all the time.[1] There was a great closeness in our Victoria Crescent community because we all went to school together, played together and did a lot of the same activities.

Our parents didn't necessarily drive then. We had to cross the railway line to get to school. We used to walk regardless of the weather because our parents would have had to go the long way round to get us there by car and we could walk there quicker. I remember us bantering with the kids from the Catholic school in the middle of the railway crossing on our way home from school because their school was on one side of the crossing and ours was on the other. Both schools are still there today.

Our favourite teacher at primary school was Max Bennett. He was always fair, friendly and very funny. Everybody loved him. The boys kept in touch with him over the years and have even played golf with him.

Several families grew up together in Victoria Crescent. I remember the Baulch's, the O'Loughlin's, the Hewitts, the Moffats, The McIntyre's lived across the road and they were relatives as well. Carolyn McIntyre was my teacher at school and she had a brother Tommy.

I spent a lot of my time at the Bloxham's house. Sherill was my best friend and still is today. We have had some fun times over the years. She remembers more about our childhood than I do! Her mum Val worked at the shop for many years. Aunty Val was like a second mum to me. I went to Sunshine Technical School with the Bloxham girls, Marg, Denise and Sherill.

A lot of my friends have married into migrant families. Sherill's surname is now Chrzanowski. The migrant community played a very influential part in our lives, growing up in St Albans. The cultures were so diverse and we learnt so much from the people who lived there.

[1] George Thomas Pyle was still living at 15 Victoria Crescent in the early seventies.

If ever anyone couldn't find their type of small goods or sausage or whatever they ate – and it was always different to what we ate – then we would do our utmost to get it in. I remember dad would deliver things after hours to people if they couldn't get down because they were sick. I remember Christmas Eve mum would be waiting in the car ready to go to the lakes and dad would say 'I just have to go down the road to Mrs. So-and-so's. I won't be long.'

I remember my father used to say 'If I ever hear you speak unkindly of anybody that comes into the shop there will be trouble, because without all these lovely people we wouldn't have a business.'

The main things I remember is the tight knit community and the different nationalities. Now I look back and think how hard that was, for somebody to go to another country where they don't speak the language. I'm just so glad we had the upbringing that we had, because if we hadn't, we might have been less tolerant.

My husband is John Payne and his parents, Bob and Isobel, who emigrated from Scotland and lived for a while in one of those horrible migrant hostels in Brooklyn. Isobel called them cattle sheds and could tell you a few stories. She had John there. Bob Payne used to work in the butcher shop when the butcher shop was actually in the store and you used to buy your meat to order. Bob had such a strong Scottish accent that people couldn't understand a word he said. Lucky he had a great sense of humour, because we asked him to repeat himself all the time,

We all have very fond memories of Rosa Kurilowski coming to our houses to help with the cleaning. I hated anyone calling her 'our cleaner'. She was so much a part of our family and the dearest person. She had so many stories to tell us about her life before she came to Australia. Mum and Bernice always got out the fine china and stopped to have morning tea and a chat with Rosa.

Everything is linked because one story leads to another and each story links to another family. The families that Gudrun talks about are the families that we always met too. I consider her mum and dad as family, and it's the same with other people that I know. Everyone who worked at the shop we considered them as our family. They were part of the establishment.

Self Bros & Goddard Supermarket, 1980s.

Colin Self, John Self, Phillip Self, Andrew Goddard, 1988

Self Bros & Goddard staff group, 1970s

Gudrun

I came to Australia from Germany in 1958 as a three year old.[1] My mother went to Germany during the war, so she was a displaced person. She was Trudi Ebert and dad was Rudolf Strossenreuther. Mum lived in Germany for a long time before she married dad. She was 18 when she married dad and 21 when they came to Australia in 1954. My mother was the youngest of 13 children, a few of whom died in the war.

Mum worked in the Self Bros & Goddard deli with Maria Bajzik, who was the deli manager, and Anne 'Miki' Micallef, who was second in charge on the deli. There were Russians and so many other nationalities.

I remember the milkman because Marilyn Butler was my friend at school and her father Cliff Butler ran the dairy. There would be horses there. That was in Main Road East where the chemist is.

I remember Andrew saying that because his father was such a clever man being an engineer he was not afraid of building things himself, so he installed lights on their tennis court. I imagine everybody who played at the St Albans courts would have played on the Goddard courts as well. Some would play at the Percy Street courts until the light ran out and then come to finish the match under lights at the Goddards. I remember them having fun days when everyone would go out and play. I think there might have been lessons there as well.

When we came to Australia there were four of us: mum, dad, my sister Sybille and myself. We didn't know a soul. We went to Bonegilla, which I don't remember as I was only three years old. Mum said that was tough – 40 degree heat and she didn't know what hit her.

My father worked three jobs: he was selling encyclopaedias as well as digging trenches somewhere, and also went to Mildura to pick fruit. My mother would take us and wait for him after work. Dad would be coming home from his second job and mum would walk us to meet him. One of us would be holding her hand and she would have Sybille on her shoulder. It was so tough. I don't know how they did it.

[1] The family consisted of Rudolf Herbert Hans Strossenreuther born 22 March 1934; Edeltraud (nee Ebert) born 5 February 1937; Gudrun born 7 September 1955; Sybille born 11 December 1956.

Self Bros & Goddard office staff, 1970s

Self Bros & Goddard delivery staff, 1970s

Mum used to work in the deli and she would say that Dudley and Lance and the others were not strict enough with the employees – it wasn't run as a strict business concern, it was run in a very family style.

Bronwyn

Sandra and I remember our father, Alf Goddard, saying to customers things like, 'It's too hot, Mrs ..., I'll drive you home.' This engendered loyalty from the customers and confirmed in their minds what an amazing man he was. Years later the Goddards are still being approached by customers who remember their dad with such fondness.

We also remember the horse-drawn baker's cart and the milk cart. A regular visitor was the 'dunny man' and the rabbit man selling pairs of rabbits at the back door!!

Self Bros & Goddard butchers, 1970s

I remember Max Bennet from the primary school. Several of the Selfs and Goddards were taught by him. In fact, I was inspired to become a primary school teacher because of my year with him in grade five. Many of we cousins kept in touch with him. He used to drive Sandra to music lessons in Sunshine once a week. Andrew used to chat with Max at every election.

The tennis court that Alf Goddard and Dudley Self built at our home was a focal point of social activity for Victoria Crescent and beyond. Mum and Dad bought a double block so we had the room for a court. Dad built lights on the court and many social events ensued. The kids would play until dark and then adults played under lights after work. Fabulous times. It was an extension of the St Albans Tennis Club and even the High School used it for fixtures on occasions.

Thinking back over the years, it is amazing how things at the shop had changed. When we were kids, much of the work was done by hand. We remember weighing and bagging sugar by the pound and bagging oranges in the new technology which was the orange plastic netting! Potatoes were also bagged manually and we weighed loose biscuits from Arnotts tins. We also sold broken biscuits at a discounted price. On the deli, customers could bring in their own jars and we decanted honey. How times have changed ...

Self Bros & Goddard was run as a family business, even as it grew. The employees and their families became close. The social club was an important part of the shop and the Christmas parties were legendary. Many long-term employees became an important part of the family and the business.

Self Bros & Goddard delicatessen staff, 1970s

Sandra

Mum [Bernice Goddard] helped run the fledgling mixed store with Grandpa after he was blown up in the quarry accident. He was unable to work there any more and had a family to provide for. He established the mixed business and Mum, from the age of 16, worked for him.

One story I remember was that Mum worked for Grandpa for ten years, collecting ice creams from the Peter's factory on the other side of town and bringing it back in dry ice containers on the train. Mum had worked for Grandpa in the shop for ten years and then when she got married, after the war, Grandpa gave her fifty pounds! She was thrilled. Can you imagine any of us working for our parents with no pay for ten years and then being given a bonus of fifty pounds? I know that was a lot of money in those days, but it doesn't amortise down to much per hour, does it? He was a wonderful man with a laconic sense of humour.

Another thing I remember about Grandpa was a story about snowballs. Mum had dropped off some snowballs she had from the supermarket for me to take to St Albans Primary School for the school fete. There was no mention of any for me and I loved snow-balls - still do! All Grandpa said was that I should whistle all the way to school. He was wonderful and I loved him.

July 2012

Note: the summary of family histories contained in this chapter is based on consultations with family members, newspaper articles and notes prepared by Mary Smith for the St Albans centenary in 1987. Some of this information was included in the 2004 publication *St Albans: Oral History from the Tin Shed Archives*.

JIMMY KNOWLES

I was born in 1935 and my parents moved from Truganina to St Albans in 1938. My father, Harold Knowles, was from North Melbourne but my mother was a daughter of the Boyd family who had selected land along Taylors Road in 1905, so the family connection to the area was stronger on my mother's side. My memories of growing up are all about St Albans. It was a small place that looked bigger than it was because there weren't many houses and they were spread out so there was lots of open space. It was still a village: there was the Mechanics' hall, one school, two small churches and a few small shops surrounded by farmlets. The community was based on these institutions and the social life that develops in all such villages.

Years ago Furlong Road was unmade – well, all the roads except for one were unmade at that time, but Furlong Road was farther out of town – and when it was wet all the local blokes with motorbikes would hold mud scrambles down there, just where the hospital is now located. Tottenham had its White City dirt-bike track[1] but St Albans had Furlong Road. Motor-cycles were becoming popular and a motorcycle club had been formed in Braybrook as well as several others in the region. Before long there were complaints of noisy exhausts disturbing sleep late at night. More serious were the accidents such as when a couple of new Australians were killed at the Furlong Road railway crossing when a train hit their bike [in 1954].

Another bad motor bike accident occurred in Main Road West when Ivan Gibson ran into a car. The Gibsons lived on the corner of Arthur Street and what is now Reis Street, previously it was Winifred Street. There were fifteen kids in that family; there were three or four boys and the rest were girls. Ivan Gibson was a really nice guy and I got on really well with him, but when he got on a motorbike he was over-confident. On this particular occasion he was going down Main Road West and Stevens's father-in-law pulled out of the drive without seeing him and Ivan ran straight into him. He was unconscious for six months. When he finally got out of hospital he needed a person on each side of him because he was shaking something terrible. It was a tragic situation.

[1] White City was also known for its dog racing events, which inspired one journalist to indulge in witticisms such as: "On Monday night last the President made the councillors speed through the routine business of the meeting like greyhounds at White City." Sunshine Advocate 26.11.1943.

In Fox Street there was a man-made dam on the corner of Theodore and Fox streets. It was the biggest waterhole in that area but there were problems in accessing the water because it was a private dam and people weren't allowed to use it for their stock. One women, I believe her name was O'Neill,[1] shot her husband and drowned herself in that dam. That story is remembered by many people from that era.

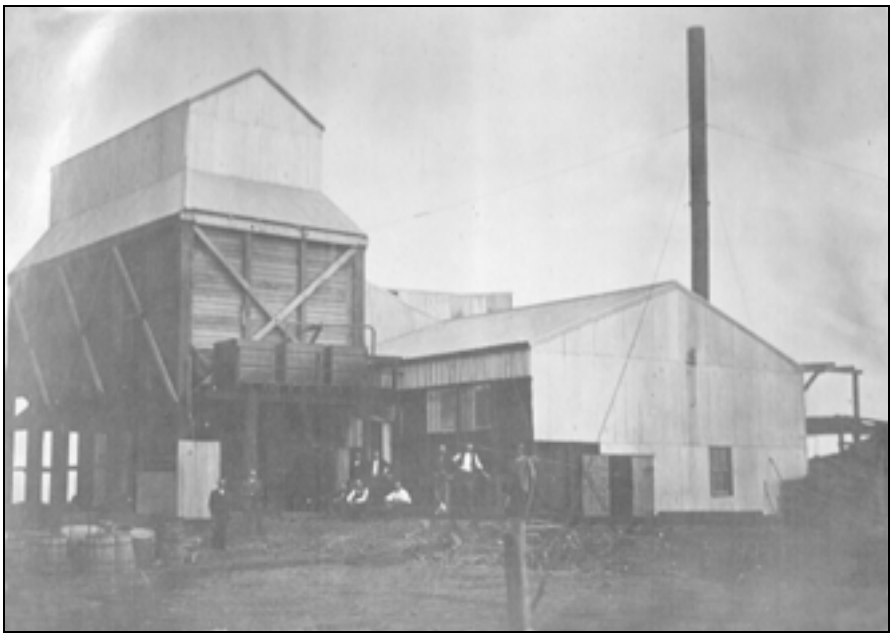
There were two or three big holes that we always referred to as volcano holes because they had lots of pumice lying around, these really light-weight stones that must have come from a volcano. Not too many people who settled in the centre of town may have known where they were, but kids from the farms on the outskirts used to go and play in these holes. There was a big one[2] on the Stevens's land which was diagonally over the railway line from my grandparents' place, the Boyd farm. We used to go playing there as kids, and Johnny Stevens would come up on his horse and drive us out, but we could see him coming because we were pretty close to the fence so we would disappear before he could tell us off.

My mother's family was from St Albans, and they were Jonathan and Emily Boyd who lived on their farm "Rockville" on the corner of Taylors Road and the railway line. Grandpa was from Coldstream and was a very clever man who could do anything. Grandma grew up in North Melbourne and after the marriage they were living in Lilydale before selecting the farm at St Albans in 1905. Here they raised sheep and cattle and also grew crops. They had an enormous corrugated iron shed with a hayloft upstairs and when I was a young lad I loved to play up there. Mum was Myrtle Boyd, and she was the youngest of the four girls[3] in her family. She also had an older brother called William. Jonathan Boyd was instrumental in getting the Presbyterian church built in St Albans. The Andersons had the farm next to my grand-parents and all that area is now part of Keilor Downs and Taylors Lakes.

My other grandparents were Sydney and Mary Knowles, who were from Wales in England. My father, Harold, was one of their fifteen children, though three of these did not survive their infancy. The family came to Australia during the late 1800s and lived in North Melbourne for many years. Sydney Knowles had a grocery store in Arden Street, and that's how

[1] The deaths of Alfred and Rose O'Neill occurred in March 1935.
[2] The big one was in the paddock to the south of Taylors Road opposite the McAuley farm. This may have been the site of the infamous sinking village of the 1970s.
[3] The other sisters were Annie, Dorothy and Eva.

they made their living. The whole family, including the grandparents, lived opposite in a former hotel on the corner of Arden and Curzon streets.



Farm buildings on Boyd property, Taylors Road.

Grandma Boyd also grew up in North Melbourne and maybe the families knew of each other, but mum and dad met through Uncle Jim. Uncle Jim Petrie married Dorothy Boyd, who was mum's sister, and Jim was a friend of my father's, so Uncle Jim introduced Harold Knowles to Myrtle Boyd. They married in July, 1931, at the Church of Christ in Melbourne. They settled in Truganina on a sheep farm and that's where the first three children were born [Bill, May and Jim]. They moved to St Albans in 1938.

As early back as I can remember of the shops in St Albans, Selfs had a little shop in East Esplanade with a little grocery shop on one side and a milk bar on the other side right next door; that's all there was there in that street. Perretts was on Main Road on the west side of the railway line. Alf Dennis had a little green grocery shop a bit further along on the corner of Main Road West and Amy Street. Next door to Eric Perrett there was a lolly shop owned by Mr Bennett. I think the next one that was built was Clarke's

Corner Store on the corner of East Esplanade and Main Road East. There was also a little shop built in Alfrieda Street and I think the name of that owner was Fiebig.

Harold and Myrtle Knowles with William, May and James c.1939.

My mother and father bought the three blocks of land in Main Road East just along the corner from Alfrieda Street and built the next three shops there. There was a Gilbertson butcher shop and then our milk bar milk bar, and that milk bar was an absolute gold mine at the time. We had a Herbert Adams cake franchise for about six months and then we sold out. The Hockings from Sunshine had wanted to start a fruit shop but they opened with such minimal stock that they'd sold out by mid morning, which is not the way to run a shop.

They soon got out and Potts took over and he sold everything. Potts came from Tyabb and no matter what it was he would sell it: he was an agent for the bank, he was an agent for Malvern Star bicycles, he was an agent for everything. As soon as Eric Alan started up his bicycle store Potts lost the agency for the cycles and when the State Savings Bank opened a local branch he lost the agency for that. The next one to build was Martello, who

built next to the corner of Main Road East and Collins Street; their shop was called Martello's Continental Grocery.[1]

Before those developments there used to be a stone wall right along there and we'd to go rabbiting along Main Road East. I remember doing that with Johnny Perrett on one occasion but it would have more than once. Green Gully was alive with rabbits. You could watch them running everywhere.

There was only one school in St Albans in the early days, and when I was going there they could never make up the enrolment to 100 kids. There used to be 93, 94, or 97, but they could never make the 100. Good old St Albans 2969. My brother Norm went to that school, but he was called Harry at that stage.[2] The teachers were Miss Bayles, Mrs Paul, and Mr Malcolm, who was the headmaster. There had only the three teachers at that stage. Miss Bayles had bubs and grades one and two, Mrs Paul had grades three and four, and then Mr Malcolm had five six, seven and eight. When you left this school you had three options: you could go to Williamstown High, University High, or Sunshine Tech. That was it. I went to Williamstown High, but Harry went to St Albans High because that had started when he was ready for secondary school.[3]

In 1945 some of the local lads really painted the town because they painted "Welcome 1945" on lots of things: they painted the railway station, they painted Syddall's cow, and they even painted a dog. There were open paddocks everywhere at the time and when they had finished painting their targets they threw the paint tins into the empty paddock at the back of our place. I don't think the police ever found who did it but I think most of the other locals would have had a good idea who it was.

I would have been 21 when the Church of England was set on fire. I was born in 1935 and was 21 when the fire occurred, which would have been

[1] Domenico Martello applied in 1954 for a grocer's licence for premises at 298-300 Main Road East.

[2] My father's name was Harold, and one day when my younger brother Norman was a tiny little kid he said "I don't want to be Norman any more, I want to be Harry." After that he wouldn't answer you unless you called him Harry.

[3] St Albans High started in 1956 but was based in Sunshine for its first year while classrooms were being built in Main Road East, St Albans. The local site was occupied in 1957. Harry Knowles was in the first intake, starting first form in 1956. The school is now known as St Albans Secondary College.

about 1956 when it burnt down, not 1966 as written in one local history book, which is totally wrong. I saw someone coming from the church when I got home one night and didn't think much of it, but five or ten minutes later the church was on fire and was completely destroyed. I don't think they ever caught the person who did that.

There were two main chook farms around when I was growing up. The Lewises[1] were on their farm on the eastern side of town between Leslie Street and Walter Street, while the Snaiths[2] were in Albert Crescent west of the railway. If you wanted chooks or eggs that's where you went. The Lewises were there a long time, as long as I was around. I remember coming back from their place one time and there was an enormous crack of lightning that split one of the trees in half and with such energy that the trunk was smoking from the strike. I was just a few yards away and that scared me a bit. I was very lucky not to get hit.

In earlier days a lot of people had a house cow and we had two. We would just let them out to roam knowing that they always stayed together, making it easy to collect them. We had Beauty and Strawberry. Beauty was tame as tame, you'd just have to call her and she'd come. Usually they wandered over to the Pinnacle Estate,[3] because there was nothing there but grass.

There were a few mysteries associated with early St Albans. At one stage there was some unhappiness amongst ratepayers because there were queries whether the council secretary or president was paying rates like everyone else. Well, the Keilor council offices ended up being broken into one night and a lot of council papers were later found burnt at the tip. It was a real mystery how that happened.[4]

In the fifties there used to be an old quarry being used as a tip right opposite where the hotel in McKechnie Street is now located. One of the local personalities at the time was George Gallagher, an elderly pensioner who sometimes worked as a shepherd around the area and lived in a little shack not far from the quarry. Young lads always liked to explore that old

[1] Thomas D Lewis may have come to St Albans in c.1892. He married Elizabeth Ellen of Deer Park.
[2] John and Sarah Snaith were from England and probably immigrated in the 1920s. They established a poultry farm on the corner of Gertrude and Albert streets, St Albans.
[3] Margaret/Mary Egan's old property, fronting onto Main Road East.
[4] In 1927/28 the records disappeared "on the eve of the audit."

quarry and one day Maxie Hempenstall found Gallagher's body in the tip.[1] No one can be sure what happened, but the police concluded that Gallagher had fallen over the edge when he was coming home from celebrations in Footscray on Coronation night. (Max has now passed on.)

There was also the mysterious death of Mr Kaska, who was a Polish immigrant running a business in McIntyre Road. Peter Cebisev's dog found the body down the old well near the St Albans railway station or at least his dog was very interested in something down that well and when they checked it out they discovered Kaska's body [in January, 1960]. Cebisev ran the Caltex service station which was virtually opposite the well. At that time there would not have been too many people who would have known there was a well there because it was concreted over. Kaska was a businessman from Sunshine who had gone missing and the discovery of his body confirmed that he had been murdered. It turned into a big affair with the police, the fire brigade, coronial inquests, even reporters from the main papers all taking an interest. It was even reported as front page news in the Age which was very rare, as news of St Albans seldom made it into the dailies. I don't think they ever convicted anyone for the murder even though the police did lay charges against one suspect.[2]

Even when Jim Eddie[3] was on the council there were still a lot of unmade roads, which is not surprising, because the state of the roads was a problem for decades, especially in the winter. Eddie's farm was on the continuation of Taylors Road, well it was called Taylors Road but it was just a track, it wasn't a made road at that time. He was able to get the road graded right up to his property, and that's where it stopped, right at his gate. Then they were developing the Stevens' estate there was a real blue over the roads. Johnny Stevens had requested a meeting with the council and council said that kerb and guttering had to be constructed in any new development, which was fair enough. John wanted to address the council because the family didn't want to do it. Anyway, Councillor Skewes at the meeting brought up that there was a Matthews Road running through their property that was shown on an old plan – not that this anything to do with it – but when they called upon John to get up and speak he was so livid he couldn't talk. John could get a bit hot headed some times and he seemed

[1] This occurred in June 1953.
[2] After considering the case, and despite suspicions, the coroner concluded that there was not sufficient circumstantial evidence to convict anyone for the murder.
[3] James Eddie was elected to Keilor shire council in 1947.

really angry with the councillor that night. I know how annoyed he could get because we bought timber off them, and one day John came into the shop making a real fuss because he thought we hadn't paid for some material, but then mum pulled out the receipt and showed it to him.

Harold Knowles

My father came to St Albans in 1938 and though I'm not entirely sure why he went into the real estate business I think it was because he wanted to do something different after he came back from the war. He had enlisted in 1939 and was one of the Rats of Tobruk in the African campaign. When he came back he was stationed near Portland and later transferred to the Watsonia camp, where his role was physical training officer and he was instructing cadets at schools such as De La Salle, Wesley, Xavier and so on. When he left the army he worked as a commissionaire in the city, which like a door keeper, opening doors for the people coming in and out of a building in the city. That was pretty boring so he went to work at Dyecraft in Ballarat Road, Maidstone. After Dyecraft he decided to take out a real estate licence. The real estate business was much more challenging and that's what he ended up doing. He operated from home in East Esplanade.

Spaldings[1] was my first job; making golf balls. I was 14 at the time I started and they were training me and this other kid to become foremen. My work was mainly concerned with making golf balls, doing the casings, binding them, and painting them. Later on I was working at Drug Houses Australia and left them to start working with dad when he opened up his real estate business. My job in a lot of cases was going with people to find out who owned the piece of land that they wanted to buy. You might have a German person, for example, who wanted to buy a particular block but didn't know the process or couldn't speak the language properly so they needed a hand. At that time you would go over to the council and they would give you the book to look at yourself. It was extraordinary the

[1] Corner of Ballarat and McIntyre roads, Albion, where Bunnings in now located.

amount of land that was owned by the Catholic church, and it was the same at Sunshine as it was in St Albans. We would look in this book to find the name of the owner and then go and ask them if they wanted to sell.

So, my father was the first real estate agent in St Albans and then Jimmy Fox[1] came along but he was based in Sunshine. In fact it was from Jimmy Fox that my mother and father bought the land in Main Road East. What really kicked St Albans off was George Eisner and the era of migrant settlement. George wasn't an agent at the start but he was a very shrewd businessman and land dealer.[2] At that time land was very cheap because you could probably buy land at about £25 or £30 a block. He would pay options on every second or third block and build it up, which of course increased the value of the ones in between. He was pretty shrewd. There was a very sad ending to that family with the death of the two daughters.

Townsend was also developing half houses. He was about the same time as Eisner but mainly on the west side of the railway line. Thornton was another one developing on the west side.[3]

The fifties was a time when land and housing was in demand because new settlers were moving to the area. The £50 house block of the early fifties was becoming more expensive. By the mid fifties, some of the inner blocks were selling for £200 to £300, four acres of land in St Albans might cost you £350, a three-bedroomed house near the station with electricity connected could cost £1,000, or a well located and more extensively fitted out house could have an asking price of £2,600. Real estate was starting to move.

My sister May[4] started the first frock shop on St Albans in one of our shops at 8 Alfrieda Street. When she left there it was John McGrossin the chemist who came in there. Next door to us was Moran and Cato, who were a branch of the one of largest grocery stores around at the time; they didn't last too long in that shop. Then there was the State Savings Bank. Vince's

[1] James Andrew Fox was granted a Real Estate Agent's licence on 8th August, 1947. His son, Andrew James Fox, also became a real estate agent.
[2] George Eisner was granted a subagents business licence in 1952, and then in 1954 he was granted a real estate and business agents licence.
[3] John Thornton subdivided Malcolm King's property in Main Road East and other estates in Sunshine. Several builders were constructing small bungalows that were popular with the European immigrants starting to settle in the region.
[4] Ellen May Knowles, married Ray Stephens in 1954.

fruit shop was in Alfrieda Street, then Dickens on the other side of that; they got burnt out. We had three blocks of land in Alfrieda Street: 18, 20 and 22.[1] In earlier days circus people used to come and set up there, and they would give us free tickets for being able to set up on the land.

May and Ray Stephens c.1954

We built those shops of ours in St Albans during the fifties [starting in 1953]. Uncle Ern Roberts[2] and I dug the foundations for the three shops and had bricklayers put up the walls. Ern was a hard worker. He was in the first world war and suffered shell shock. I remember he had a job with the tramways at one stage and when he got going he wouldn't stop for anything, not even lunch. The others couldn't keep up with him. His son, Ray Roberts, is still with us but another son, Jack, died a little while ago; he was about 87. Jack was with the St Albans Historical Society.

More businesses were being established because the population was growing. Harold Easton had a hardware store[3] that backed onto Alfrieda Street, and at that time they only had a road going up the front and the back of the block because the centre part between the roads had not been made. He got a council grader to come and scrape a pathway across the land between the roads so he could get through without going the long way round. I knew that particular section was zoned parking, so I parked in there one day. He came over and was very fiery, demanding I should get out of there. I refused to move. He said "I'm going to get the police." I said it was zoned as parking and that's what I was doing. Anyway, he went off to get the police and I called him back. He thought I was going to move the car, but I told him, "Could you please give my regards to the police when you when you go over there." Of course he didn't report anyone.

[1] Two shops in Main Road East were in the name of Knowles & Stephens in 1970s. One of these was the late Mr Potts' store that May Knowles took over after 1957.
[2] Mrs Roberts and Mrs Knowles were sisters.
[3] Easton's Hardware Store was established in 1956 in East Esplanade opposite the Railway Station. Harold Easton was a candidate for the council elections in 1947.

The first road to get made on the Keilor side of town was Walmer Avenue. This encouraged further development as the sites on made roads became more desirable, and gradually all the roads towards the railway line were sealed. We started to build some flats and house around the area, including in McIvor Road where Elsa Fry lived. (She passed away not that long ago.) Elsa was the sister of Mary Smith née Stein, a family who came to St Albans in the twenties. Mary's husband, Eric, was well known in the area for his connection with rotary clothes hoists, and Mary has been active in the history society for many years. Their daughter, Helen, was the principal of one of the local primary schools.

What happened with the tennis club … the old tennis club in St Albans had been operating for years as a pretty small and exclusive group. I was the first of the new membership to join but found it difficult to be accepted, so I went to join the club at Albion and then decided to play cricket. That tennis club was so cliquey that when Bill Self - no relation to the Self brothers – was transferred to Western Australia the club folded up. There was me, Laurie Haynes, John Perrett, and a couple of others who kept it going. Laurie was president and I was secretary-treasurer and goodness knows what. There was a little green wooden building in front of the courts towards the street. Rae had a little bit to do with this at the time. Tennis was a popular activity and even the Presbyterian church near my parents' place had a tennis court at the back. Occasionally I would go and practice there but sometimes one of the neighbours would come and tell me it was only for church members. We would also go and play tennis at the Goddard's place because they had a tennis court. They were a very nice family and it wasn't unusual for us to stay for tea after the game.

Before our kids were born, Rae and I used to go to Sunshine council meetings because they were very entertaining, with the walkouts and abuse all that sort of stuff always happening. We became friends with Tom McIntyre and Don Joiner. I think it was through our liaison with Don Joiner mainly that we got the new tennis pavilion in Percy Street. The old one was then demolished. One night I was going out, probably going to meet Rae, when I saw the light was on in the old tennis building, so I thought I'd better investigate. As I got close I could hear voices and I took it very carefully because no one should have been in there. I discovered three guys there, and I knew two of them, who were planning a housebreaking. I walked in and this guy said to me "Don't worry, Jim. Nobody is going to get hurt."

My brother Bill started the St Johns Ambulance Brigade in St Albans and

also started their drum band, so he was pretty active in that group. Smoking killed him.[1] He was a very defiant person but still got cancer. I asked his specialist if it was caused by smoking and he said yes, but Bill always argued that a bit of smoking never hurt anyone.

Rae: My sister was 41 when she died of cancer. She never smoked or drank. My mum had cancer and my other sister has it, so obviously it is hereditary.

Jimmy: Joan Patterson was also very active in the local St Johns Ambulance Brigade, and she had a brother called Sid though his real name was Ian. The family lived next door to the Stevens on the west side of the railway line. Ern Patterson was the father, and he was a big man with an interest in bike racing. In the 1950s the name of Sid Patterson was well known because he became famous as the Olympic and world cycling champion, but Joan Patterson's brother was definitely not the champion bike rider. We used to go out to the Northcote velodrome and saw the other Sid Patterson ride out there. I think the local boy also had a health problem in having only one lung or something like that which would have hampered any championship aspirations.

The Nuts was a reception centre that the family built in Alfrieda Street. That was built about 43 years ago and we ran that business for 17 years. We called it The Nuts because it was not on a main road and we wanted a name that people wouldn't forget. A lot of Masonic Lodge events were held there. The first wedding celebrated there was by a Polish family and over the years there were a lot of ethnic wedding celebrations held there as well as every-thing else. The Polish and Slav customs were heavy on the use of spirits for celebrations and there were some heavy drinkers around. There was nothing much available in St Albans as a venue for celebrations apart from the old public hall but the acoustics there were dreadful. If a couple wanted to get married and have a reception they had to go to Sunshine or Footscray. After 17 years we sold the business to a solicitor in Deer Park, who then sold it to an Asian chap in Maidstone. I think it was called Alfrieda House Receptions at that stage. The chap who was then renting the building wanted changes, which did need doing, but the new owners wouldn't spend any money on it. When the lease ran out it was sold to a church group, so these days the old reception centre operates as a Christian community centre.

[1] William Knowles was born in 1932 and died on 1 July 1993.

Dan Gavaghan married Jan Barnard, who was a teacher at the Sacred Heart Catholic School. Dan and I are in the same bowling club. Jan's brother is Des Barnard, who is very active with the St Albans Football Club which is now based at Kings Park. Jan and Des's father was Fred Barnard, who is always remembered as building the Catholic Church in Winifred Street.

We were very lucky to grow up in St Albans when there were all the open paddocks around us with the cows, the sheep and the rabbits. When it was raining we used to run around in the gutters and the paddocks but we never seemed to get sick so all the open air must have been good for us. I remember at one time the Melbourne zoo was appealing for tadpoles to feed their platypus. My sister May and brother Bill went out to the ponds around the area and collected tadpoles by the bucketload. There were ponds all over the place in St Albans so the two of them just went out and got as many as they could. Bill must have been aged about nine or ten at the time. We estimated that they had about 23,000 tadpoles! They took these tadpoles into the zoo by train and it was a bit embarrassing because every time the train would jolt the water would splash out of the bucket, but they got there. The bloke at the zoo started counting the tadpoles but pretty soon gave up and paid them … I forget how much.

Eric Perrett ran the post office from his shop in Main Road West and he was a terrific bloke. When dad was overseas – he was in the war as one of the Rats of Tobruk – if he sent a message home Eric would bring it up straight away and give the message to mum, which was very much appreciated. We still have the telegrams where he told us that he was coming home. Dad was one of the lucky ones because he came back. He seldom talked about the war though one time he told me that of a thousand blokes that went over only about twenty or thirty came back. Another thing he said was that he saw some very brave things being done but in a lot of cases the wrong men got the medals.

During the war we had to have all our windows blacked out at night. There were air raid wardens in St Albans whose job was to make sure that there was no light shining through widows. Teddy Turner was the warden around our place. If he could see any light he would tell the people they had to black it out.

Alf Goddard may have had the first car in St Albans and they were scarce because you just couldn't buy them. We had about the fourth car in the area, which we got about 1949. It was an English make called the Jowett

Javelin and cost £870 for the standard saloon version and £995 for the deluxe version. I remember that because my father wrote a very complimentary letter about the car to the company where he'd bought it and they used that letter as part of their advertising.

My brother Bill was involved for a long time in supporting the scouts because he was taking them everywhere. He would hire a bus and take them on scout camps and have them at their house doing things. He also tried to encourage our boys to join the scouts but they were too busy playing tennis. He even accompanied some on a trip overseas and helped with the cost of fares. Joan Patterson started that off with Leslie Self. John Dreher was my scout master and he did a lot for the club and probably deserves a few more accolades for all his hard work. I was about 10 or 11 when I started with them. Kevin Jarred was another one involved.

Bill was never a sports person, whereas I played a lot of sports: cricket, tennis, baseball, bowls; anything at all with a ball I would play. Bill didn't; he was more interested in scouts and St Johns. He was also a dancing enthusiast for a long time. I even played baseball on Errington Reserve where the Tin Shed was built. They had all sorts of activities there and I also started playing table tennis there with Kon Haumann. He was a really nice guy and is still running the table tennis there. I ended up playing bowls for a long time and am a life member of the Keilor Bowls Club. I've been secretary there for about twelve years.

Bill worked in the family shops by taking care of the bookwork and picking up all the parcels from the station while I and the others were manning the shops and looking after the customers. Of the four of us, three worked in the shops whereas Harry did all the bits and pieces that needed to be fixing up around. Harry was very, very clever with his hands; he did all the repairs while the rest of us served in the shops. Our mum, Myrtle, also worked in the shops. She would often be sitting on the chair at the counter knitting socks and serving customers. Everyone will tell you to this day that they used to get clothes there and take them home to try them on and if they didn't like them they would bring them back and not have to pay anything.

My mother was a marvel because not only did she work in the shops but she made all her own clothes, knitted our jumpers, grew our veggies, looked after the cows and the chooks in her spare time, as well as growing flowers and selling them to a florist in Paisley Street Footscray. That just

doesn't happen these days. She was always home when we came home from school.

We were lucky because we went into business at the right time, and probably got out at the right time. We knew what people wanted. I remember one firm saying you've got to have velour, but we said velour is not for St Albans, you can't sell it. We had to buy what we could sell to the St Albans people and St Albans was a different place so you had to buy certain things.

There is a Knowles Place in St Albans, which is a lane three houses up from where the family lived. We had trouble with that lane. Harry owned the land facing Theodore Street but there was no driveway to Theodore Street, so you had to come down the lane from East Esplanade and go into his block. I owned the block next door and we would share the lane entry. Then Harry wanted to build flats and needed another five feet so I transferred some of my land onto his title. The lane wasn't paved or anything and the council wouldn't do anything about it because the road hadn't been made, so Harry and I had to pay for that lane to get made. Problems occurred later because there was a family living on one side of the block and another family on the other side, and one family would park in the lane and not let the other family in. It finished up going to court. Then the council put a sign up saying no parking.

Rae: I come from Sunshine, or more specifically from Burnewang Street Albion. My father came from Tooborac and my mum was from Cohuna. We moved to Moonee Ponds when we were little, and then we shifted to Burnewang Street in Albion. Fenner is the family name.

I went to Albion primary school and I was one of the girls who did the maypole dance for the queen when she came to Australia. We had had to do a spelling test to see who would be chosen. They had these tall poles and they had to have ten dancers to a maypole and you had these long strips of material and you had to dance round and in and out, underneath, and everything. When the Queen and Duke of Edinburgh went around in a car after we did the maypole I touched his hand. I can always remember that and I said I am never ever going to wash my hand because I touched the Duke of Edinburgh's hand.

Jimmy and Rae Knowles, May 2012.

St Johns Ambulance Brigade Drum Band being led by William Knowles

Scout group at presentation ceremony.

Sydney and Mary Knowles with their children. Harold Knowles is in the back row on the right. North Melbourne 1923.

ISABELLE DAVIDSON née MacRAE

Discussions with Isabelle Ethel Davidson née McRae were held in 2005 about her memories of growing up in Sunshine and her connections with St Albans and Keilor. She had family connections with the McRaes and the Honeys of St Albans. After living interstate for 26 years Isabelle resettled in Keilor and established a business in St Albans, and some relatives still live in the district. When she retired to Taylors Lakes she started writing about her life experiences, some of which have been incorporated into this story.

Isabelle Davidson

I was born in 1917 in a little town called Linda, which was in the Linda Valley off the west coast of Tasmania, about five miles from Queenstown.[1] People had come to the area after the discovery of gold and copper in the 1880s, and the little town prospered on the mining, but once that started to decline so did the population. Linda is a ghost town these days and there's virtually nothing there except the old hall. That's where my father sometimes used to play the bagpipes and the mouth organ at the Saturday night dances.

I was one of eight children born to Agnes Illingworth and Dugald McRae. My father was born in 1874 in Clunes, Victoria. His parents were Dugald McRae (1840-1920) and Dorothy Fairburn (1850-1925). Grandfather Dugald was from Ross and Cromarty, Scotland and Grandmother Dorothy was from Roxburghshire, Scotland. They migrated to Australia independently and married in Victoria in 1868. My grandfather came here in 1853 so he was just a young teenager during the gold rush era. My father was born in 1874 in Clunes, Victoria. He was one of eight children born into the family between 1869 and 1886.

My mother Agnes Illingworth was born in Ballarat in 1874. Her father was Jachin Gordon Illingworth who was from Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Her mother was Jane Ann Dempster who was born in 1854 at sea. They married in 1871 and had five children.

[1] Isabelle's story of growing up in Linda was included in *Thanks for the Memories The Overnighters Book*, Andrew Rule (ed); Floradale Productions, 1991.

I was born in 1917 when my older sister Eva was aged 18. My earliest memories are of the little town of Linda. It was so small that even the local church closed down because there weren't the people there to keep it going. There were a few small shops but the four hotels were more popular with the miners. I still have a photograph of one of the hotels in the family album, but it is an image of a ruined building in a ghost town.

There weren't a lot of entertainment opportunities in our little mining town. On public holidays in the good weather the Linda railway station was good for the occasional picnic train, which was a huge steam engine with canvas-topped trucks that would take passengers out into the country. On Saturday nights dances were held in the local hall, which wasn't very far from one of the hotels, and sometimes the pianist didn't show up. My dad would then be asked to play the bagpipes or the mouth organ as entertainment for the dancers. That same hall was used for the Sunday night moving picture show. Entry was a silver coin, which for most kids would be a threepenny bit because no one had much money. All the children sat in the first three rows and the adults down the back.

Even though I was there only a few years, I still remember some of the town's more exotic characters. There was a chap we called Charlie the Chinaman with a long pigtail who had a little shop selling groceries and sweets. If you didn't have much money this is where you could buy a carrot, a parsnip, an onion and a stick of celery, the basic ingredients to make soup for your dinner. The sweets were kept on the shelf at the back of the counter so that children were not tempted to pinch them. Charlie's shop was a necessity because it was almost impossible to grow your own vegetables in Linda because of the smoke and gases from the sulphur furnaces killed everything in the garden.

Another interesting character was Mr Osborne Conway who was known as Black Ossie though he was not black. He was one of the earliest pioneers in the district and established a laundry service in Queenstown but later ended up working as a miner. I wonder if it was miners dust that suggested his colourful name. The children liked him because he made brightly-painted dolls out of papier-mache. When his health deteriorated he was admitted to the New Town invalid home.

Hawkers would come to the district with their horses and vans selling knick knacks, material and odds and ends essential for a housewife's sewing requirements. There was one man with a van who would pass through town several times a year with his packages and boxes containing linens, materials, soaps and powders and anything else that an isolated housewife might need.

It was a novelty for us kids but it was essential for Mum. She had a hand sewing machine and would make all our clothes so she needed the materials and accessories. You only bought what you needed at the time. I heard my mother say he had a fancy woman on the other side of the town.

We did not have a big place, so if there was a special occasion such as a birthday or other special festive event when you were expecting guests to arrive, you stacked the furniture onto the front verandah to make room for the dancing. Of course Dad was a musician but there was also an old wind-up gramophone and people would dance and sing to the popular tunes of the day.

Times were tough and I was one of eight children.[1] When my brother started working in the mine, Mum used some calico flour bags to make his work trousers. At the start he was earning about 15 shillings ($1.50) but when he worked overtime he received up to 29 shillings ($2.90) a week. He would give his pay to Mum to cover board, clothing and food and she would give him back 2/6 (25 cents) as pocket money for himself. My Dad was the big earner in the family because he earned four pounds ($8) a week.

Mum and Dad moved a lot following whatever mining work was available. They paid $50 for one the houses we lived in and that came furnished. I don't remember how long we stayed there or if that place was just an unavoidable expensive option. The family was quite poor and followed any available work in the mines. I recall living in timber shacks with inside walls lined with hessian and newspaper. Whenever we moved we took all our possessions with us including the kerosene tins. They were our wash tubs and laundry troughs for boiling clothes and for heating water for our weekly bath. It was always cold in the winter but manageable when the tub was in front of the nice warm fireplace. There was a roster for the bathing and the water was used more than once with some extra added as it cooled. The remainder was used to wash the floor and if any water was left after that it was used on the flower pots or the bit of garden patch.

In about 1921 my family came to live in Sunshine and I remember when I was younger I lived with my parents in Fraser Street near the intersection with Anderson Street. Dad used to ride a bike to the Newport railway workshops where he worked. That would have been in 1921. The steam train used to go past our house, which was quite near the track, on its way through Deer Park.

[1] Siblings included Gordon, Eva, Rita, Donald, Alan, Flora and Dugald.

When we were little us kids used to collect the coal off the train tracks to use on our fire, because there were no gas fires or anything like that in the area at the time. We used to walk along the railway line and pick up any coal that had fallen from the trains and take that for Mum to put on the fire. I was about four or five when we did that.

Dugald and Agnes MacRae with children in Fraser Street, Sunshine, early 1920s.

My father was a McRae and he used to come to St Albans to visit the McRaes in Taylors Road. They were Farquhar and Annie McRae who were the wealthy ones, because they owned all that land along the north side of Taylors Road from Sunshine Avenue to Green Gully, which is all part of Keilor Downs these days. They had cattle, horses and sheep on that property. There were other McRaes in the area, but they were not related to us.

Dad played the bagpipes and he started the first pipe band in Sunshine; I'm talking about Scottish bagpipes. He was Dugald MacRae, which is a real Scottish name. They started the pipe band in my mother's kitchen. The first drum was a tub that they turned upside down; that tub was what everyone used to bathe in, in front of the fire. They had plenty of bagpipes because there were a few Scottish people around. Dad's grandfather gave him miniature pipes. I can remember those, they were beautiful and I've never seen any like that since. Even when I went to Scotland I have never seen any miniatures like that since.

I had two sisters who were champion Scottish dancers. Eva was eighteen years older than me and Rita was about sixteen years older than me. Dad would take them to Ballarat and everywhere on the train to enter the dancing competitions. Because they were champion dancers the girls always won first and second prizes in the dancing competitions. They'd get something like 2/6 (25 cents) for first prize and Dad would keep that. He'd taught them dancing so I imagine he thought the prize was his. Other times they'd get things like a slice of watermelon for first prize; that would have been brought down from Queensland and was a big thing. That's all they'd get, but it was the honour of winning that was important.

Apart from knowing the McRaes in St Albans, our family became related through marriage to the Honeys when my sister married Norman Honey. His brother, Jack Honey, was a long-term St Albans resident and bought a lot of property in St Albans. I don't know what year they arrived, but Mum and Dad Honey were up in Buchanan Street, which is off Main Road West towards Station Road. The whole family were there: mum, dad, and the two boys Jack and Norman. Any Honeys in St Albans would be related, I guess. The old people used to have a poultry farm. Land was very cheap at the time and nobody bought just one little block in St Albans. Jack bought the land where the Catholic Church was and also in the street in East St Albans that was later named after them: Honey Street.

Jack Honey was a Keilor councillor for quite a few years. He married Winifred Stenson of St Albans and they had three children. Their son Fred worked in a bank and ended up as a manager in country braches. The second son John worked for the RSPCA. Their daughter Gwen married Zenny Kratsis and had two children; she's living in Werribee these days. One of the Honeys still writes to me every three or four weeks. They had a big holiday house on the coast, so they've turned that into a nice retirement home. The old Honeys eventually moved to Williamstown Road in West Footscray, next door to their son and my sister who had shifted there. They are only narrow homes on Williamstown Road.

From Sunshine I shifted to West Footscray. My father died in 1924 when I was seven years old and it was hard for mum as a widow. Dad died of tuberculosis, which he probably got from working in the mines. I didn't know much about it at the time because I was so young but I remember him one day leaning over the front fence and coughing up blood.

Though I lived in Sunshine I would still come to St Albans on occasions for an outing. I left school at thirteen and started working as a housemaid in a boarding house before getting a job with a milliner and working in that shop for two years. After that it was with a shoe maker and later at "Sandy's" which was Sands and McDougall in Spencer Street, Melbourne.

In 1934, when I had turned seventeen, I bought myself a bicycle. It was only a second-hand one that cost me 25 shillings ($2.50), but it was wonderful because it gave me the freedom to explore. My girlfriend and I would set off with sandwiches and an apple wrapped up so carefully in one of mum's serviettes on a nice sunny day and sing some old songs and chat away as we rode along. We would ride down to the shallow creek and the

tiny bridge at the bottom of Green Gully and have our little picnic there. That little creek was known as Taylors Creek and we'd dip our serviettes in the water and cool our faces with that. I was fascinated to see the hillside on the Keilor side of the valley was terraced with rows and rows of vegetables, and a couple of Chinamen – they couldn't be anyone else – with long pigtails and large Chinese hats were carrying long poles with baskets of vegetables attached to the ends. It was getting late and we decided not to venture across the bridge and up the hill. I will never forget that scene because it was so peaceful.

After my father died the family moved to Footscray and were living in the same street as the Davidsons family. I married Cyril Ernest Davidson in 1938, when I was 21 years of age. Cyril was a Footscray boy from Pilgrim Street. He had been working in the motor service department at Preston Motors and would often come to see me Sandy's where I was working. We decided to build a home in Sunshine and there were a lot of migrants there when we were first getting on our feet.

We were in Dunbar Avenue just off Wright Street in Sunshine and there was nothing there then. Land was advertised for sale but you couldn't get a loan or anything so you had to save enough money to get the minimum. We paid £600 or £700 for a block of land and they said there was water and electricity there.

When we got there the water was there but it belonged to the farm you could see over the creek and it was their private water supply. There was no electricity connected to the block so we had to pay to get our own pole put in to get electricity to the house. We had enough money to build a little 18 foot by 12 foot room. I had Zane, Nola and Leslie in that room – three children, myself and my husband lived there. We were the first in the street. We had to get permission and pay the owners to get water connected to our house from that private water supply, "as long as no one else taps into the pipes" said the farmer.

There was all this land around us and people thought because we had water that everyone else could get it also. We had every nationality there. There were all different nationalities and they used to come over with a bucket to use my tap. One bloke and his mate built a fowl shed and lived in that. There were the Dietriches; he was a furrier. They used to do some work for us around the house when we built the shop and later on.

I had a shop in Sunshine which my husband had built for me. I said when I was a kid that I would like to have a lolly shop. The lolly shop became a bit of everything. It was in Beachley Street off South Road that used to run to the air force station.[1] We used to supply them with lunches when they got sick and tired of their own food. There was also the school. The shop was near where all the railway prefab houses were built.

When we first got back to Sunshine our block was right near the bottom towards the Kororoit Creek and we'd walk right up to the top near Wright Street to the horse trough. That would be our drinking water. We relied on that at the start and my kids never got ill or had anything wrong with them. We bought a couple of old horses that you had to whack to make them move. I had one primus, the pump kind, and that was to do all the cooking, the heating, the bathing and everything. There was only one shop between there and Sunshine shopping centre. It was a good walk up there. I used to go there with a pram bumping over the paddocks.

I used to go see my mother sometimes once a week in Footscray. She was a wonderful old lady, a wonderful cook and a wonderful mum. She'd say, "What are you going to cook tonight?" I'd say, "Oh, a bunch of carrots. I'll throw them on the table and that will have to do."

I used to have a pressure cooker. The kids were taught to go and catch rabbits, but they only did it once or twice. I put the rabbit in the pressure cooker on the primus; that was all we had to cook on. We were sitting on the side of the bed, because the room had the bed and the kitchen table and everything in the one room and Zane was in the pram. We heard a terrible retort and shot off the bed. I hadn't put the lid on the pressure cooker properly and when the pressure had built up it popped the lid off and there was rabbit and food all over the walls.

The kids loved playing outside. They'd make daisy chains and all sorts of things. They were healthy kids. As you got money you built the rest of the house, but there were half-houses a long, long time. There were a lot more a lot longer at St Albans.

At one time my brother used to work at McKays shunting trains. My father worked at McKays for a while and so did my husband. I was disappointed when they closed down, because they employed a lot of people.

[1] The RAAF depot was on the corner of South Road and Ashley Street.

After I got married I spent about 26 years living in other states before we came back to Victoria. I was in Queensland, then in Taree in New South Wales, and finally at Mt Gambier in South Australia, before coming to live in Keilor and work in St Albans.

We were in Brisbane during the war because Cyril was in charge of servicing aircraft up there.[1] Cyril was a motor mechanic but he ended up doing an apprenticeship in aviation at Essendon airport specialising in aircraft engine reconditioning. There was an American chap there from General Motors looking for aircraft mechanics and that's how they recruited Cyril. There were only six people in Australia with his qualifications in servicing American engines and he was working on the Catalina planes. They recruited him to recondition engines but about half way through the war it became cheaper to replace them with new ones from America rather than bother with repairing them because the production was so fast over there. After that he became the aircraft engineer for Barrier Airways for Catalina flying boats. He ended up opening a workshop in Brisbane but no one had any money so we decided to go back to Victoria.

For a while when the girls were young we were living in Taree, which is along the New South Wales coast about 400 kilometres north of Sydney. Taree was a nice place and we had a nice landlady who I understood was a widow.[2]

As had been arranged, she came to the house every Thursday to collect the rent. She was a tiny person and I quickly recognised her arrival by the gentle knock on the door. I would give her the rent money and she would then stroll off down the side path to a small garden shed at the back. We didn't have access to that shed as it was space she wanted to use for herself. Sometimes she spent half an hour in there by herself before leaving for home. The back yard was a great play area for the children because there was old apple tree there with solid branches with a nice swing for the girls to play on.

I was curious about my landlady's behaviour and at one stage asked her

[1] Davidson was tall for his age and is said to have gone to the recruiting office in his scout uniform when he was 12 to join the CMF and was in the militia for 5 years. Just before war was declared he went to enlist in the regular army and discovered that his eyesight wasn't good enough to get in.

[2] Isabelle's story about her Tarree landlady was published in *The Way We Were: The Overnighters Book*; Andrew Rule (ed), Floradale Productions, 1998.

politely what she kept in the shed that was so interesting. All she said was “a bit of this and a bit of that." I often invited her to stop for a cup of tea but she was reluctant to do so. At one stage I even followed her down the path but she closed the door before I could see inside. I tried looking through nail holes in wall but couldn't see anything. I even tried standing on a box to look through the top of the curtained window, but again I didn’t see anything.

One day my curiosity got the better of me and I forced the door open. I found a collection of things that must have belonged to her husband. There was a pile of hats, jackets of many colours, neatly folded shirts, and several pairs of boots. I immediately regretted breaking into that dear lady’s private space. When Thursday came around again I insisted that she join me for a cup of tea as I had something to tell her. I explained to her what I had done and wanted to apologise for that. I thought she was going to cry but then she smiled and said she’d feared I was giving notice that we were leaving. She didn’t want that to happen because she’d grown fond of the children as she never had any of her own. The items in the shed belonged to her late husband and spending time there would bring back cherished memories.

We became good friends. My two daughters gave her a lot of pleasure and when I moved from Taree I always wrote to our nice landlady. We kept writing for well over a decade and then it stopped. When I made inquiries her sister told me that my nice landlady had fallen into ill health and was being admitted into an old age home.

When we left Brisbane and came back to Victoria Cyril established his own car service business at 286 Spencer Street, which he named “Zane’s Autos” after our son [c.1952]. He started off with just an empty shell of a building with a dirt floor and no doors so he fitted it out with car packing cases. Cyril was very clever with the mechanics of cars and especially with the front suspension on some of the American cars so he became successful. He was there for about four years and it nearly killed him because he was working so hard that he was existing on four hours sleep at night.

While he was doing that I was running the milk bar, which was a lot of work and not much money.

In 1953 we entered the first Redex around Australia car trial because Cyril thought it was a good way of getting publicity for the business. Officially, I was the “crew” while he was the driver and the technical expert on engine

efficiency and weight distribution. I was only one of nine women who were part of the racing crews, and probably the only mother of four children, and we were outnumbered by the 500 men who made up most of the crews.

The track was 6,500 miles, which is probably only halfway round the country if you went by coastline, but it certainly felt as if you'd hit every bump and pothole in the country by the time you finished for the day. It was a really tough experience that had its share of unforeseen dangers. You had to have a pick and shovel to dig the car out if you got bogged in sand or a ditch.

We started off in our Holden at the Sydney Cricket Ground on 30 August 1953 with nearly 200 cars and amazingly there was a crowd of over 10,000 people to see us off. Even Jack Brabham, Jack Davey, and Bob Jane had entered, so that was the quality of the competition and quite possibly part of the attraction for the large crowd.

The trial route was to go anti-clockwise, with the first stage the fairly easy target of Newcastle just 100 miles away, and then it was a 15 hour trip heading north for more than 500 miles to reach Brisbane. Thank goodness for the scheduled 12 hour break.

There were two people per car sharing the driving and navigating and what a problem that was at times with missing signposts and others pointing in the wrong direction. If you took a wrong turn it could put you out by many miles. We were one of the unlucky motorists when we passed through Glen Innes on the second day of the trip, because some drivers were booked for speeding but we took a wrong turnoff because someone had deliberately turned a sign the wrong way and we went for several miles before we realised our mistake and turned back. It cost us at least half an hour before we were back on the right road.

We really were in the outback, sometimes on unmarked tracks, sometimes dodging potholes, and mostly concentrating so hard on getting to the next destination that you didn't have time to be admiring the scenery if there was any to be admired. There were no service stations where you could stop for a quick car check or ask for directions. Sometimes we'd pass these little places out the back of nowhere and there'd a youngster, often clinging to their parent, waving hello to us as we passed. This endurance trial really captured the imagination of people.

At the end of the day we were completely exhausted and dusty as a drover's dog when we pulled into the sleeping ground. We couldn't sleep in the car because that was full of spare parts, so it was a case of grabbing a blanket and sleeping on the football ground that was the designated over-night stop, and the ground got harder as the night grew longer. If you were near the camp fire and stayed awake long enough you'd hear all these marvellous stories. It always seemed that you'd just gone to sleep when the alarm rang to start all over again. It was exhausting.

If you didn't reach an 'official' sleeping area you'd just sleep wherever you could. One night we slept near a convenient waterway and were told next day that it was usually full of crocodiles. I don't know if they were joking or we were lucky, but I can tell you they certainly had me worried.

Next day it was up to Brisbane and then Townsville and from there we were supposed to head for Mt Isa and Darwin, which was to be the longest section of the trial expecting to take at least 25 hours in the car. But the whole thing had got too much for me. We had problems with the radiator and the exhaust was so loud that you couldn't hear yourself think never mind trying to talk and having to make instant decisions and giving directions about the turnoffs. We ended up pulling out of the race at Townsville along with a lot of other cars.

Isabelle Davidson at the Redex Around Australia Trial, 1953.

My husband did a similar trip in the Ampol trial of 1956, but I wasn't going again so our daughter Leslie was his co-driver. She was only seventeen at the time but was an experienced driver because in South Australia you could get your drivers licence at sixteen. They did that trip in a little Morris Minor, and Cyril said they would make a good team because Leslie could pull her weight as a driver but didn't add much weight to the car. They were running fifth against some pretty tough competition but at Kingoonya they ran into railway tracks sticking out the ground and blew out all the tyres as well as damaging the wheel rims, so that was the end of the race for them.[1]

After my husband decided to stop that business in Spencer Street he sold it and got enough money to set up another business in Mt Gambier.[2] Cyril had been working too hard in that other business and had collapsed a couple of times in the street, so the doctor said he would be dead by 45 unless he stopped. That is why we decided to establish the Blue Lake Motel because we thought that would not be as stressful. Cyril had worked with Americans and read a lot of American magazines and the idea of motels, which was a very American development, appealed to him. We picked Mt Gambier because it was a real tourist area especially around the lakes and it was more or less halfway between Melbourne and Adelaide, so it was a good location for a motel.

It was a good business because it was the first motel in the area and the occupancy was very good as we used to have regular customers. I treated people the way I wanted to be treated myself. I used to put on entertainment at night. My husband was no good to front the people - he was good with the brains and I was the front one. It was a zoo when we started because we didn't intend to let any units until everything was finished but in the end my sister was sewing the curtains in each unit as people were trying to get in. We bought the materials and she was sewing all the curtains. In the morning after we opened when I saw all these dishes …

We had no dishwasher and there were no laundries in Mt Gambier, so we had to do all the dishes, sheets and towels ourselves. We had a stupid-looking washing machine in a nice big laundry, but it was that powerful that

[1] To reduce weight Cyril carried few spare parts and had contemplated not taking any spare wheels. After the accident he could not replace tubeless tyres on the damaged rims. Only 34 of 113 starters finished the course.
[2] Before moving to Mt Gambier the family lived in Geelong Road Brooklyn where Cyril worked as a garage proprietor.

it used to jump around like a kangaroo. It got such a run when it started going that we used to sit on it or else it would go out the door. Each morning the stack of dishes … I couldn't believe it ... everybody loved to have eggs and sausage and stuff that left greasy dishes. Then when you're dog tired and think you're going to have a rest there is a lot more to do, such as washing and drying the dinner things.

After four years we sold the motel to Reg Ansett's outfit. It was a lovely setting and we were always busy but there was nothing else to do apart from the work. Reg Ansett was expanding his business and with their planes landing at Mt Gambier they wanted guaranteed accommodation for their customers. Our business was always full so we didn't really need them, but we could see that there was going to be greater competition and they were big enough to possibly put us out of business if they set up nearby. We were offered good money so we decided to sell up and come back to Melbourne.

In 1960 when we came back from South Australia we brought the ponies with us. We left one polo pony behind, Kim brought one coloured one, and we had a show horse too. They were badly knocked about in the trap bringing them from South Australia.

Isabelle and Cyril Davidson

We were looking around where to live and fell in love with Keilor, which I remembered from my earlier days. Keilor's got a bit of history because it used to be on the route to the goldfields and the old hotel in Keilor traces its history from that time. It's still got the original jail, which is not visible to the public because it is in one of the houses. It's still got the gateway to the Overnewton estate. The manor house is still there and that's where the local doctor was living for some time.

The river used to flood at Keilor and my daughter has a photograph of one of her horses beside the flooded river.

So we bought a house in Keilor. It was a lovely place only about five months old and still had apricot trees in the back when it had been subdivided. We sold the show pony to the Keilor milkman who'd put it in the shows and win prizes for it. Kim kept her horse. They used to have a trotting track on top of the hill outside Keilor near the house on the crest. Kim was a tiny girl but she'd carry the saddle up the hill and back, and brush her horse every day.

Everybody seemed to know each other in the Keilor village and they'd always say hello to you. In the early morning you'd hear the clip clop of the milkman's horse and the song of birds waiting for crumbs and scraps at day-break. There was only one house on the crest of the hill and that's where my children would keep their horses adjoining a trotting track. In the spring the side of the hill would be ablaze with bright yellow dandelions, but now it is covered the most magnificent looking houses you would ever wish to see. I stayed in Keilor a long time and five of my grandchildren attended the primary school in the village.

Christmas time was great. The carol singers would arrive in the evening in a huge truck under our street light. They would toss out bags of sweets to the children, some of whom would be in their night wear. I remember that on New Year's Eve if you were in Keilor you would hear a lone piper playing a tune from one of the hilltops around Horseshoe Bend. It's always been a mystery to me who it was, but the music of the bagpipes seemed to echo through the village and me having a wee bit of Scottish from way back really enjoyed that as the introduction to the new year.[1]

Kim got married at eighteen or nineteen. She lives in my old house in Keilor, down in the dip. It was new when I went in there but that was a few years ago. They love it because it's a big block of land and has old trees in the back yard. Her daughter, Sasha, who is twenty-seven now, sleeps in the same bedroom that Kim had as a little girl.

In earlier days the Green Gully Road was just a track and quite dangerous for anything on wheels because people have been killed on that road. In those days dirt roads and stray cows were a natural hazard for cars. We

[1] This may have originated from Overnewton, as the owners of that estate did use the services of a piper. It is not known if this was the case at the time this story occurred.

had a car because Cyril's business was all about cars and engines. We bought a Monaro and that became one of his favourites but then it was stolen. The police contacted us and told and that us it had been left near Ballarat Road. When we went up there to collect it, it was gone again. Gone for good this time, because it was never found again.

We shifted here [Keilor] and bought property in St Albans in 1965 or 1966. My husband had some land left to him by his mother and we bought that land along the railway line from Main Road West along McKecknie Street and past where the St Albans Hotel is now located; it was about six acres.

We set up a petrol and gas station and put up a big sign that we were selling JAP gas. We had a big opening day and got a couple of Japanese women from the city to come in their kimonos to give away Japanese fans to every customer. It was a shockingly cold day but they looked lovely in their traditional costume. We had quite a few people serving the customers, my brother included and other family members to serve that day. It was usual to provide full driveway service in those days, not like the mostly self service petrol stations you see these days.

We were selling the petrol so cheap that on the first day we had queues all the way to Main Road and the police ended up coming to control the traffic so it wouldn't clog up the main road. All the family worked there at odd times, including my daughters and my son Zane. We used to do all mechanical work as well as selling gas.

We knew all the people we served as customers. They were good customers and always paid cash. Apart from petrol we used to supply the gas cylinders, the 100 pounders. Kim, my youngest daughter, used to throw them on the cars – you want to see her nice shoulders. Leslie was a slim thing. My son still owns that land. The business is leased out but he still owns the land.

I lost one daughter, Nola. She lived in Canada and America for a good while, and then she had a heart attack. That was a big shock. You find it hard when the kids go. You expect yourself to go first and the rest to trail after.

From 1966 to 1978 we were running the gas station, doing repairs and selling gas. Then it went mainly to selling gas and some mechanical work. Kim used to fill up the gas cylinders. Leslie's husband worked there for quite a long time and all the family did. Kim's husband was driving the vehicles, and Zane was driving too. It was all in the family. We used to import the gas cylinders for all the caravans. My husband had to deliver I don't know how many cylinders on a hot day off one of the trucks for one of the country blokes. He used to go to Werribee and lots of places with the gas.

I didn't touch the gas. I used to serve a bit of petrol, but mostly I'd register all the trucks and pay the blokes, make sure all the cars and trucks were registered, pay the wages, and do the income tax. I'd still have to cook the tea and look after the kids and feed them and then I'd be up til 4 o'clock in the morning doing the books sometimes. My husband was quite spoilt because the girls and I spoilt him. Sometimes about midnight he'd say "What profit have we made today?" I'd be tired but if you couldn't produce the figures boy oh boy was there trouble.

Then he'd hop on the plane and flit off somewhere where he wanted to go, or he'd say "Hop in the car and we'll go up to the Gold Coast for a fortnight. So-and-so can run the business." He'd send Zane off to Tokyo or somewhere and import barbed wire. There was plenty to worry about.

We had Jack Freeland working for us. He had something wrong with his legs but he had such a nice nature. He started with us after the business had quietened down a bit.

We got the hotel licence in St Albans. It's a funny thing about hotels, if you wanted a new hotel you had to be somebody in the business or well connected. We fought for years, court case after court case, to get the licence and building permits. Every time we'd get a sign put up there'd be someone

fighting against us because they wanted to put one up somewhere else, but they didn't want to at all and bought ours in the finish. They do that.

To get a licence for a hotel in those days you had to have the proper plans, of course. The son-in-law did that for us, that was his job really. It may not have been his name on the final plans but he designed it. Then you had to work out how many meals you'd serve. You'd have to have a trained barman … everything to do with a hotel. We had to send Leslie's husband somewhere to be trained as a barman. It was a lot of malarkey going through all this sort of stuff.

The trouble was that when we were planning all this my husband mentioned something to a property developer and that was his biggest mistake ever, because all of a sudden someone else is trying to do the same thing because selling the land with a hotel permit would have meant a lot of money. There was a continuous court battle with this guy that went on for nearly five years. We spent many thousands of dollars going through solicitors and getting licences.

In the end we did get the permit for the hotel but we didn't have the money to build it. The legal proceedings had drained us of most of our funds so we sold that land with the permit. That's why we built the garage there, so we could have a bit of income while we fought the legal battle over the hotel.

I said to my husband I couldn't stand taking my kids to a hotel. Do you remember the 6 o'clock swill in the hotels? It was disgusting. When the 6 o'clock swill was on the hotel smelled awful. Beer was almost running out the door, because they'd get as many drinks as they could and put them on the window sill. After about 10 past 6 they'd all be drunk and you'd see them rolling around, my brothers too. It was disgusting. The coppers would grab people and there'd be big trouble. It was a terrible way to drink.

My husband died working hard, working like a navvy. He died in 1978 at Keilor, and he was only 60 years of age. He always had a good philosophy. You've heard of the saying "Don't bite off more than you can chew." His philosophy was "Bite off more than you can chew and chew like hell."

I moved to my current home in Taylors Lakes in 1989. At that time, the farthest that the suburb went was the Taylors Lakes High School, now it's spread much further. The name Taylors Lakes comes from the local creek, Taylors Creek, that runs into the Maribyrnong River. They've dammed the

creek in a couple of areas to make it look like a couple of lakes. It's the same Taylors Creek where my girlfriend and I had that picnic so many years ago in Green Gully.

In recent years I've been writing stories for the 3AW Overnighters series and for Keilor. They advertised in the paper wanting people to write about living in Keilor and what they thought about it. I'd never written a line in my life … what can you write? I thought you can only write about what's true, how you feel, that's the easiest way. Anyway, I started to write and then you do it again and again and make it into a story. Memory, something true, is always easier than imagination. For instance, my girlfriend and I rode pushbikes out along Green Gully Road and Kealba, and that's what I've written about in one of my stories.

Often when I can't sleep I lie in bed listening to the late night radio programs. That's how I discovered Keith McGowan's 'Overnighters' program on 3AW. I really loved hearing the stories and finally decided I would ring up and share some of my memories. It's been a delight to have my stories published in the Overnighters book, and I have made a number for friends from amongst the other people who've also contributed to that program.

A few years ago I went and bought myself a word processor as they were known at the time. Not a computer, but an electronic typewriter with batteries and a tape and a little built-in screen where you could read what you were writing. I got my daughter Leslie to do it on the computer later. One of my stories was about the lone piper who used to play the bagpipes on New Years Eve. We never knew who he was. Nobody ever knew, but he would be there every New Years Eve. He sounded lovely down in Keilor Village. That's how I started my story about St Albans. I've also written about that Redex Car Trial, the 'mystery women' who was my landlady in Taree, and about my niece Doreen who I have dubbed as "the lady and the log cabin" that she built in picturesque bushland at Westburn.[1] These stories are only a small part of my life. My mother often told me that I lived the life of a gypsy but that's not quite true. I have known some real gypsies, but that's another story.

Isabelle of Taylors Lakes.

[Isabelle passed away in 2009]

[1] *The Way We Were: The Overnighters Book*; A Rule (ed), Floradale Productions 1998.

Cyril (left) and Leslie Davidson (centre) with the Morris Minor used in the 1956 Ampol Around Australia Trial

JOHN PERRETT

This story is by John Perrett, who was born in June 1934 and still lives in St Albans. Eric and Effie Perrett ran the general store for four decades.

My grandparents, John and Elizabeth Perrett, and their son, Eric, moved to St Albans in February 1923. My father was christened William Eric Perrett but he was always known as Eric. The family had been operating a delicatessen in Burnley Street Richmond, but had wanted to move further out into the country, so they moved to the other side of town and for a while had a produce business in Railway Place Flemington.

Then they bought the general store that Harry Harrison had been running since 1914 in St Albans, so it was a going concern when they took it over. I think the family wanted to have a business that could include them all in its operations, but it was also the idea of a rural atmosphere that grabbed their attention. My father was attracted to that environment because he was very interested in horse racing and breeding. Flemington of course had many connections with horse racing but Keilor really was in the country.

St Albans was a just small country village with a population of about 120 people when my family arrived in 1923. There were just a few shops in the

central area and only one paved road; the rest of the streets were only tracks made by horses, drays and people walking about, often making their own footpaths by taking shortcuts across any unfenced paddocks. There were a few houses scattered about the central area and all the rest were on the small farms around Taylors Road and Main Road.

Electricity was already connected to the central area, but there was no water and no sewerage. Everyone had a galvanised iron roof and they would collect rainwater into iron tanks. When the large blocks of ice began to be delivered to the area people bought ice chests. Before then the only form of cooling available was the old Coolgardie safe method. These were chests with outer layers of canvas or hessian that would be kept wet so that the evaporating water would cool the contents. People would locate these near the back door or in a shed or a fernery or somewhere like that in the shade where there was a regular breeze available. That's where people kept their dairy products or meat, but lack of refrigeration was also the reason that people had to get fresh food. Dad's shop had a cellar, and that's where the dairy produce was kept.

Horses were important for farmers as well as in the business and social lives of the equestrian fraternity. Our store relied on horses to deliver the groceries as well as bringing produce to the store. There was a bit of a siding off the railway line near the station and that's where some of railway trucks would be shunted for loading and unloading. Sometimes we might have three trucks there filled with wood, briquettes and wheat. The shop was relatively close to the railway station but it was still a big task to move the tons of material into storage at the back of the property. Dad would hire extra help who used horsedrawn drays to bring it all into the huge back yard and then stack it up. It had to be done properly and that was all by manpower, so the stacks of wheat in the big shed were built a tier at a time to form a ramp so you could get the sacks right up on top.

We used the horse and cart to deliver the produce that people had ordered from the store. One day my grandfather was thrown from the cart when the horse bolted and he was injured in the fall, which led to more serious health complications and he later died. This would have been in 1938.

The horse fraternity was quite active at the time in the region. The McRaes had a big farm on the corner of Taylors Road and Sunshine Avenue that stretched back to Taylors Lakes. Mr Farquhar McCrae and his wife Annie bought that land after the Overnewton estate was auctioned off for farm

allotments and they used it for growing oats and raising horses, cows and sheep. Mrs McRae had 3 children who went to the St Albans primary school: Malcolm, whose nickname was Sonny, Florence, who was known as Flora, and Jean. Every Sunday it was open house at their place – like a gymkhana – a gathering place for people interested in horses and they would put on a good Sunday spread and hold activities like horse jumping.

My father was a keen horseman and rode at the Royal Melbourne Show and various country shows, including local gymkhanas as they were sometimes held in places like Sunshine. I remember one of his favourite horses was a good jumper and I have a photograph of dad on the horse jumping over a rail fence. As soon was I could walk I was plumped on a horse. Later my father bought me a quite gentle horse so that I could be part of the activities but my grandmother wasn't happy with it because she thought it was too old and placid. Later in his life my father bought property in Gisborne and then he was able to breed and raise horses more seriously.

Eric Perrett

Sonny McRae and my father were members of the Oaklands Hunt Club and that group would organise a whole lot of events that were popular with horse riders. Hunting with horses and hounds was a very popular activity and tended to be somewhat exclusive, because you had to be nominated to be considered for membership and then invited to join. This club was named in the 1880s after the place where it was established, Oaklands Junction, which is out Bulla way north of St Albans, and Farquhar McRae was involved in its early stages. They held riding and hunting events all over the region including Sunshine, St Albans, Keilor and Keilor Plains, which is one of the old names for the St Albans area, but it was also used for a much larger region. If there was no fox to be found on the day of the hunt they would lay a scent trail for the hounds to follow anyway so that the day's activities could still be held.

I remember my father saying he took part in one of their hunts not long

after he moved to the area. They met at the St Albans railway station and took the horses over a variety of stone and rail fences through a number of properties. At the end of the day it was customary to give a toast of thanks to the people who'd let them ride across their properties. The day's activities were reported in the Sunshine Advocate, the local weekly paper, and also in the Melbourne Argus. Those articles were probably submitted by someone from the club, but the fact that they were published is indicative of the interest in such activities.

It was my father who recommended Welkin Sun, the horse that nearly won the Melbourne cup in 1952, to Sonny McRae. Dad was always on the lookout for horses because he was interested in breeding and would be asking about good lineage prospects and he came across one through his connection with Watkins on the south side of Main Road West. Alf Watkins was a retail butcher who had farms across the area and a friend of mine was managing a property for him in Neale Road Deer Park. That's how they got to know about Welkin Sun, because that horse had four brothers who were showing good form so it was thought he could be a winner. The horse cost one hundred pounds but dad wasn't sure about buying it himself, so he told Sonny McRae about it, who bought it. Well, that horse won the Werribbee Cup, the Geelong Cup and more, so there were definite possibilities of an even bigger win. Nevertheless we thought Sonny was aiming a bit high by nominating for the Melbourne Cup because it was a longer run against tougher competition.

On Melbourne Cup day it was very exciting listening to the race call over the radio because Sonny's horse ran very well and 100 metres from the finish it was leading the pack but was beaten by the New Zealand horse Dalray at the end by half a length. The bookmakers' odds for Welkin Sun were two hundred to one on the day, so you would have to say that coming runner up in an exciting finish in the Melbourne Cup before a crowd of 90,000 people was a fantastic achievement for a horse that cost a hundred pounds.

I don't know how my parents managed to fit it all in because they both worked very hard seven days a week and Sunday was when they did all the clerical work. My father was very good with figures, which was an important skill because he had to balance the books, especially the bank and post office records. Mum was always a partner in the running of the business with dad so she was also very busy. On top of that she would leave the store before closing time and go home, which was about a hundred metres away, to prepare the dinner. After a full day's work she still

aimed to have dinner ready for us when we arrived home. Even when we went on holidays we would be working. We loved to go for holidays to Torquay because there was an uncle there running several kiosks catering for the camping fraternity. Torquay was always a very popular holiday destination and there were a number of camping sites. My uncle had these kiosks and of course we would be helping him selling drinks and ices. There was no refrigeration as such so it was whatever you could keep cool on ice. We still enjoyed our holidays.

My mother, Effie (Euphemia Clara Boadiciea) Hughes, was born in Collingwood in 1909. She was the youngest daughter of William and Clara Hughes whose maiden name was Howqua. The Hughes were a large family living in St Albans when mum and dad met. They married in 1933. There were a number of sisters around the region and some of them are still around; their married names include the Bedfords and the Bloxhams. I still speak regularly with my cousin Valma, who was a Bedford and married a Bloxham. That's how I became related to councillor Bert Moffat, through a marriage on my mother's side of the family. Bert was from Hampshire Road in Sunshine and played cricket for the East Sunshine Cricket Club. In 1941 he married my cousin Beryl Bedford, who was from St Albans. Bert put in years of service to the local community and for a time he was the vice president of the St Albans Police Boys Club. He stood as a candidate for Keilor council in about 1948 and served as Shire President for a while. They named a street after him in the Stevensville estate.

Dad and Stan Haynes were the local Justices of the Peace and they were always busy with forms and witnessing declarations. The Progress Association approached Keilor Shire Council in 1945 and nominated my father because they thought more JPs were needed and that's how he was appointed. People needed all sorts of things signed by a JP and it would happen at all hours. It wasn't unusual for dad to be interrupted during his dinner because someone needed a form signed. Another thing was that the St Albans Police Station, by this time it was in Main Road West, would close at 10 p.m., but if the police had to take people elsewhere overnight they had to get a JP's signature so my father was doing that as well. A lot of people in St Albans remembered him as a JP. This was all voluntary work and it took up a lot if his time, but by father did not begrudge it at all because it was a service to the public. He took his role very seriously and this would include being a guest speaker at numerous venues and functions. He was a regular M.C. at the Mechanics Institute Hall in East Esplanade for occasions put on by the Anglican church and he was also a committee

member of the Ratepayers Association that would also meet in the hall. There were regular events such as euchre and dance nights or cribbage and dance nights that were put on as popular entertainment as well as fundraising for local clubs or charitable purposes.

Dad had an old Ford with canvas sides and because there were only a couple of cars in the area at the start he was offering lifts to people, or people would come and ask for help in emergencies or when other options were not available. Taking a pregnant woman to hospital was so much easier if you had a car. One day old Mr Stevens when he was frail and ailing and prone to wander walked down the road in his pyjamas and dad said “Look after the shop for me while I take him home.”

He also took on local fundraising. When Footscray Hospital was being built in the 1920s my father raised funds for them in this area with raffles and so on; he was constantly selling tickets. He didn’t want any recognition for his work but the hospital did make him a governor. Maybe it was easier for him because he knew everyone in the town and he enjoyed people’s company, particularly with the football ... he did a lot of work in the football club.

The Anderson family was very well known. Peter Anderson was one of the early farm selectors and they had three boys (Fred, Horace and Keith) and three girls (Ethel, Myrtle and Evelyn). They were in Taylors Road near the intersection with Alfrieda Street. He bred horses and would usually win a prize in the show for some of his ponies. Their old house is one of the last remaining in that area. All the boys became local farmers, buying land on Taylors Road on the western side of the railway line. Fred ended up with some property running south from Taylors Road to Kororoit Creek and would drive a four-horse team to plough the land. They would grow hay there.

John and Mary Coleman were another of the early settlement families and they also were in Taylors Road, next to Fred Anderson. There were three children in the family: Jack, Nellie and Sarah. When the two sisters were going on their regular journey into Melbourne they would drive their horse and cart to our store in Main Road and leave it there. Then they would catch the train into town and do their shopping and sightseeing. They were always impeccably dressed in stylish black for these occasions. Nellie would play the organ at the church and at weddings that were held there. There was another Coleman connected with the area, Walmer E Coleman, who was selling house and land packages in the Pinnacle estate in the late twenties, but he was not related to the John Coleman family.

The general store, post and telegraph office, and Commonwealth Bank agency taken over by the Perrett family in 1923. Main Road West.

Jim Eddie was mainly a sheep farmer and he contributed a lot to the community through years of service as a local councillor, including as Shire President. He had bought several of the farm lots along Taylors Road west of Kings Road towards Kororoit Creek. One of his farm blocks was next to Fred Anderson's but he also had a couple of larger blocks opposite.

The Calders had a property on the corner of Station Road and Main Road West. They raised three sons and a daughter. One of the sons, Gordon, was a local councillor for the Shire of Keilor.

Cyril Clements was a pig farmer at the end of Main Road West. He donated land in Kings Road near the Main Road intersection for the recreation reserve that is now named after him.

John Kennedy was the son of a primary school teacher and lived in the house near the Presbyterian church. John also trained as a teacher and was later appointed as headmaster of the school connected to the Sacred Heart Church. The station master, Del Kennedy, was not related to them.

Two of the Missen boys were on the football team and they were Colin and Mervyn; the other Missen boy was Kevin. Mrs Jean Missen was a sister of Sonny MacRae and was very house conscious. Lenny Butler was also on the football team and so was Col Harris who married Lenny's sister, Gwen Butler. Col and Gwen had three girls and Col has now moved to Sydenham to be with one of his daughters. I bet he would have some good stories of growing up in the area.

Cuddy Doherty was on the football committee and I think he may have taken over as president of the club from my father. There was another family in the region with the Doherty name but they were not related to Cuddy. These other Dohertys had a big bakery in Sunshine and their well-known carts would even deliver bread to places like Footscray and St Albans, and it was Mr Albert Tong who did the deliveries in St Albans. Albert and Rose Tong were British immigrants who lived in Elizabeth Street behind our grocery store and one time there was such a strong wind that it blew the their whole roof off and they had to go and get it from the paddock. There were sheets of roofing iron everywhere. A similar thing happened to me much later with the house up in Gisborne, when a neighbour phoned to say that the roof had been blown off in a storm. I think the Tong children, Chrissie and Doris, are still in the region. Chrissie married Vinnie Carr who had been in the war. Doris married Tom Majewski

from Footscray and I think they are living in the old family home.

Old Bill Hounslow had three sons (Edward, Joseph and …) and a daughter. He was a carpenter and builder and the family established a small woodyard in Main Road East not far from the railway station. Bill's sister was Mrs Alice Errington. She's the one who donated the land for the sports ground known as Errington Reserve where we played football, cricket and tennis.

Mrs Lodge was a lovely person who was the housekeeper for Mrs Alice Errington who also put on a good turn for servicemen. Mrs Lodge had a small hall in her back yard and would put on a welcome home show and events for men returning from the war and other such occasions. After Mrs Errington died her place was used as a boarding house for a while and Mrs Lodge was the housekeeper there. Stan Lodge lived next door and his daughter Bev taught dancing and also helped put on good shows for people.

There was a women who I always thought of as "Lady Collingwood" because although she lived a nomadic life she struck me as having an independence that spoke of better times. She had nothing but a pram of possessions and lived in the open, survived by selling knick knacks and throwing a bit of canvas against a wall if necessary for a place to sleep if there was nothing else available. Prue McGoldrik in her book about Sunshine mentions her as a "retailer with a difference" in her button-up boots pushing her pram on her regular sales route through Keilor, Melton, Werribbee, Little River and then back to Sunshine to start all over again. My father said she had married in England but the rest was always a mystery. I think she may have received some mail occasionally from England and dad would have known if that had occurred because he was running the post office, but he never talked about things like that.

Green Gully road was very steep climb in those days. At the bottom the Dodd family had an orchard and they also owned the Keilor pub. The Dodd and Delahey families were related through marriage and their descendants settled on both sides of the river. Mrs Delahey kept her family farm going after her husband died and was one of the original selectors of land in St Albans when it became available, acquiring several large blocks including some along Percy Street between Main Road East and extending past Furlong Street. The neighbourhood of Delahey is named after the family even though it is near the ABC radio mast where the McAuleys had their property.

Mr Charles Stenson and his wife Emma had an orchard down at the end of

Biggs Street near the river and he also owned some of the property where the Catholic school was built. I think they were one of the first orchardists in the area and started a vineyard but were more successful with apricots. Fred Stenson, who was Charles' nephew, came to help run the orchard and later bought and lived in the house that is now the Catholic presbytery. I remember him as owning that farm and the presbytery site so he must have bought it or inherited it from his uncle. He served for many years as a Keilor Shire councillor and was also a trustee for Errington Reserve.

Les King was the milkman and they had about three daughters. He was a very likeable chap and also a keen football supporter. At the half time break he would be offering people a cigarette, but that was OK at the time and the football club would arrange an occasional smoke night as a get-together or fundraiser. Even my father had acted as MC for "smoke socials" that the Progress Association had arranged for similar purposes. Les and my father would often go to Newmarket stock sales looking to buy cows. Les and his wife had bought a large parcel of land half way up Kings Road (as it is now known). That's where he kept and milked his cows. In those days when you subdivided a large property you had to contribute a proportion for recreation purposes and when he retired Les subdivided that land and donated some for a football recreation reserve. That's where the St Albans Football Club is mainly based these days and that's why that neighbourhood is called Kings Park.

The Stevens family was involved in many local business ventures over the years. The father, Mr James Stevens, purchased land along Main Road West where he established a small farm and raised four boys with his wife Agnes. As well as helping to manage the farm, the sons eventually set up businesses in real estate and building supplies. I often played tennis with the youngest son, John Stevens, who was also on the football team. I would join John and other colleagues at various fundraising dinners and functions put on by groups such as the Lions Club. That was a pretty big club based in Sunshine at the time because St Albans wasn't big enough to have its own and the Progress Association was already taking care of local fundraising. John's first wife, June Butler of Sydenham, was involved in voluntary charity work but she died of a tumour, which was very sad. I understand their son Mark is a reporter with the Sun-Herald and has also been a broadcaster on the radio; he reports a lot on football and other sports.[1] John did remarry later.

[1] John and June had three children: Karyn, Donna and Mark

The Stevens were also a musical family with Mrs Agnes Stevens being a good piano player and two of the sons, Johnny and Doug, having good singing voices. She did a lot of charity work around the neighbourhood and was heavily involved in school and church activities. I think she donated the land where the school for children with disabilities is located next to the Jamieson Street Reserve.

The oldest of the Stevens brothers, Gar, married Flora McRae who was part of Sonny McRae's family that I mentioned earlier. Gar and Flora adopted a boy, Les, when it seemed they could not have children and then ended up having two children of their own. Les Stevens became very involved in the family business ventures especially the St Albans Building Supplies which he knew back to front. That was the main hardware and timber supply business in St Albans for many years and a generation of home builders would be familiar with Les Stevens and that store.

The Dickson family were carpenters who had a property where the Deer Park Shopping Centre is now located. They built a lot of houses around the area. The son, Les Dickson, was the same age as me and we were good friends. Les became an accountant with ICI in Deer Park (now Orica). He did so well with them that he was promoted to a top job in the New Zealand branch of the company.

A lot of people worked at ICI in Deer Park and rode their bikes to work because it was the easiest way of getting there as there was no direct transport otherwise. Nettlefolds in Albion was where quite a few St Albans people were working and they at least could catch the train as the factory was quite close to the station. North Sunshine was an area with a variety of manufacturing businesses so work was available there but this type of employment was not available in St Albans.

When I was born in 1934, Australia's population had reached 6.7 million with St Albans contributing about 400 to that total. In the meantime Victoria was celebrating the centenary of Edward Henty's landing at Portland, the event that is generally regarded as beginning the true settlement of the state. This was such a significant event that King George V sent his son, the Duke of Gloucester, to open the centenary celebrations in Melbourne and half a million people turned out for the occasion. But though the population of St Albans had increased since my parents had arrived a decade earlier, it was still a small rural village.

John Perrett c.1950s

From what I remember, early St Albans was so small that you knew everyone, and if by chance you met someone new and had forgotten their name you would just ask the next person you saw along the street and they would know. I remember the family store when I was a young child and being impressed by how central it was in many people's lives. Everyone had to come to the store at some time because it was the only place you could buy a newspaper, it was also the local post office agency so there was the collection or postage of mail, and pension payments at the time were made through the post so had to be collected from there, and the only public phone was outside on the porch next door. Working in the grocery store also had its moments and interesting ways that people would overcome communication problems. Some of the migrant women would bring labels from food packets so that they could be sure of getting exactly what they wanted. Mum made friends with one women who was a regular buyer of OK bars – they were a type of chocolate bar – so mum's nickname for her was "Mrs OK." One chap came asking for "aggs, aggs" and dad thought he was saying "axe" so he went out and got him one - turned out the chap wanted eggs.

My parents put an emphasis on education because they saw that as the best way of making a success in life. When I went to primary school there was only the one school in St Albans and that had only three classrooms. I attended this school from 1939 to the end of 1945. The first headmaster I remember was Mr Cunningham, who lived in Sunshine, and I also remember Miss Bayles. There was no secondary school in the area, so after grade six the choices were the technical school in Sunshine, the high school in Williamstown, or the Hyde Street Central School in Footscray – I think they had the best band in Victoria.

I went to Hyde Street Central for a couple of years and that's as much as you could do there, so I then went to University High School to finish my

secondary education. I would leave home before 8 a.m. to get to school. We used to start early and finish early so that we would avoid the peak hour traffic when the factory workers were heading for home.

One of my classmates at Uni High was Mick Aylett, who went on to become a successful VFL footballer and became part of the development and administration of the league as captain of the North Melbourne Football Club and president of the VFL.

I played football but that was at the local level. I also belonged to the tennis club and we all played social tennis. I remember Bernice Self from the tennis and she was a very nice person who was very well known and respected. As far as football goes, my father always saw St Albans as a country town and said it was only natural that country towns had to have their own football club. He was the foundation president of the St Albans Football Club and was involved for many years. A public meeting was held in September 1946 at the St Albans Fire Station to form the club. Twenty-six people attended this meeting and that's when the club started. My father was elected as the president and Stan Taylor as coach. Errington Reserve became our home ground and I think the club had to pay two pound ten shillings as the annual fee for use of the ground and facilities. The 'facilities' was an old hut that was on the reserve and gradually the club started to make improvements to this with things like lockers, a verandah, and hot water for showers. We started with 26 members but in country towns in those days people paid as much attention to the local football team as they did to the league (VFL) and before long we were getting two or three busloads of supporters turning up for the games.

I remember Stan Taylor because he was the team captain and coach and he taught the lot of us the proper way of playing the game. There is a great photograph of the early team including my father and some of the other committee members. When that photograph was taken there were no photographic studios in St Albans and the whole team went to Footscray in their football gear to get that taken.

One of the difficulties with small country towns is how to occupy the time of the young people in productive ways. That's where sports clubs were important, but Constable Bill Shaw came from Sunshine set up a police boys club. I attended that and I remember him for his beautiful Irish accent and the language flowed so beautifully even when at times it was interspersed with a lot of fruity vernacular. Then came constables Power and

Frank Miller. They all did good work with the boys club. I remember that Harry O'Neil had the small shop next to our grocery and some of the local lads would meet in the back room to play card games. Youth always needs space and an outlet for some fun and games.

My father was on the advisory council of the St Albans High School when Mr Torpey was the principal there. I remember Mr Torpey because he was my mathematics teacher when I was at University High, so that was another interesting coincidence meeting him again. Torpey had a love for maths and tried to instil that in his students; he certainly encouraged me. My father was also very adept at figures and I also developed a mind for that. No calculators or computers in those days, just a long column of figures on a page and a good mind for mental arithmetic: "That's not right," my father would say running his eye over the page as he was balancing the books and then quickly recalculating. Balancing the books was always essential, especially as my father acted as a bank agent as well as for the post office.

But after running that general store in pretty much the same way for thirty years it was time for change, because St Albans was suddenly growing much bigger. From a couple of hundred residents at the turn of last century the population had increased to about 1,000 between 1930 and 1950. Then in the fifties the population really went ahead because of the post-war migration and the little village grew to 4,000 residents in 1955. This of course meant that there was much more demand for goods and services and a variety of other stores were started to cater for this demand. In September 1955 an official post office was established, so we lost that part of the general business. Dad then sold the grocery side of the business to Mr Wardle and established the news agency as a separate shop just a couple of doors further along the street. This became the St Albans Authorised News-agency. The town had grown large enough that this was now viable as an independent business whereas that was not possible earlier.

Mum died of a stroke at the age of 50, which is a bit young. That was in 1960 and after that dad retired and bought a farm in Gisborne to breed cattle and race horses. However, he still maintained connections with St Albans as by this time he had purchased some property and built a few shops along Main Road that he leased out. So he still retained a business interest in the area and the news agency still continued as a business.

I wanted to become a veterinary surgeon, but at that time there were no vet courses on offer in Melbourne; you had to go to Sydney University and

there was no chance of that happening for me. I decided instead to become a pharmacist but was too young to get into Melbourne's Pharmacy College. I was only 16 at the time and it was a four-year course but you had to be at least 21 in order to get registered when you qualified, so the timing was not right for me. I worked in a pharmacy for a year to get some experience and then enrolled in the course. After I graduated I worked for John White in Glenroy for 8 years. Then in the early seventies I had the opportunity to buy a store in St Albans, so I did that. It was well situated on Main Road West near the railway station. In those days the St Albans Community Health Centre was providing medical consultations and it was very busy but did not have a dispensary. It was common to finish business at 6 p.m. but I wasn't very far away from the health centre and decided to keep the shop open till 9 p.m. in order to cater for their patients. In those days the doctors in St Albans were mainly located on the west side of town, so I was very busy. I had to employ temporary staff and casuals to manage the workload.

By the seventies many of the European families knew my father through two decades of his business and community activities, which helped me a lot in establishing my business, because the family name was so well known and respected.

I ran that pharmacy for fifteen years and then in 1988 I sold it. I didn't intentionally plan to sell the shop, it was an opportunity that occurred unexpectedly. One day I received a phone call from the Sigma company asking if I was interested in selling the business. I said I wasn't, but later got to thinking that the reason they were phoning me was because they must have someone who wanted to buy it. They had a big pharmacy in the Deer Park shopping centre but they must have had ideas for expanding. I phoned them back and had some discussions and as a result I sold my chemist store to Amcal and Dipak Sanghvi.

My father was church-minded and attended the Church of England in East Esplanade across the railway line from the primary school but my grandmother was the most regular church follower in the family. That first church was built of timber in 1910 but unfortunately it burnt down, so they built a new one in brick. There was another equally small Presbyterian church built in 1912 not far away in that area between East Esplanade and Victoria Crescent. These churches were well established before we arrived and they were central in the community life of the village. The Catholic church and its adjoining primary school were built much later, in the 1950s, when the Catholic congregation increased because of the influx of central

European immigrants settling in the area.

I remember there was a young man by the name of Geoffrey Sambell who was the minister at the Anglican church for a while. He started his theology studies in 1937 and was appointed as a lay reader to the Footscray Parish, which was responsible for St Albans. He would catch the train with his bicycle and attend to parish duties on Saturday, and then return on Sunday morning for prayers and Sunday school. He would then cycle across to Deer Park in the afternoon to lead evening prayer and classes. He read the service at my grandfather's burial at Footscray, which would have been in 1938. He was eventually appointed as archdeacon of Essendon. That young minister went on to make quite a name for himself within the Anglican system and through much broader social action in Victoria and nationally, because of his involvement with the Brotherhood of St Lawrence. He became the executive director of the Brotherhood as well as achieving the level of Archbishop within the church hierarchy. He died in office as the Archbishop of Perth. These days the Brotherhood holds an annual "Sambell Oration Dinner" in recognition of his vision for social justice.

My father was constantly involved with the Gisborne farm until the late 1980s when his memory started to fail and he started to lose his independence. This was when I sold my business. When he needed more care than I could provide he went to live in the Western Suburbs Nursing Home in Yarraville. He died in the Western Hospital Footscray in September 1991 at the age of 90.

Anyway, I've been retired for several years but I'm still involved in the racing game as a part owner of several horses. It is nice to see your horse come in a winner, whether it is at Flemington, Sandown, or anywhere else. One of my best horses was Bust Up who won several races in the city. Another one was Over Yonder who was a winner up in Darwin. It's great when your horses win but it's also a business venture and having a good trainer is one of the most important things. I worked closely with Ray Lawson for many years and relied a lot on his advice. After he died I dropped off my direct involvement in racing to a large extent.

I've probably had more success than my father as far as horses winning races, but dad was more experienced in actual shows and riding.

John Perrett, March 2012

St Albans Football Club 1947. Eric Perrett fourth from left, second row from front.

FRED BARLOW

Frederick Noel Duckett Barlow was born in Melbourne on 25 December 1920 and married Gwladys Latch in April 1943. They moved with their two young children to St Albans in December 1949. Fred is remembered as the iconic milkman of the fifties doing his pre-dawn deliveries by horse and cart. He died in 2008.

Children: Jeffrey "Jeff" born 29.1.1944
Glenda born 12.11.1945
Steven born 19.2.1950
Tony born 6.1.1953 died 22.9.1998
Paul born 3.3.1966 died 5.8.2007

After the war Fred worked at Smorgons Abattoir and when the family moved to St Albans in 1949 he worked two jobs for 14 years: as a cleaner and as the local milkman. He rose at 4 a.m. for the milk run with a horse and cart and worked as the school cleaner during the day. Gwladys also worked part time. Nellie (Gwlady's sister) and her husband, Con, who were living in St Albans, had bought a milk bar, so that is why in 1964 Fred and Gwlady moved to Seaford where they had also bought a milk bar. It wasn't a success. Fred then worked as a salesman at Richardsons for 17 years, and was retrenched when they were taken over. He was 63 at the time.

Fred Barlow came from a family of six children:

- Jimmy was the oldest, served in the Army in World War II, was a POW and worked on the Burma Railway. Had asthma and died about 2 years after the war.
- Daisy, called herself Margaret, married Jack Kenny. When Fred's mother died, Daisy looked after the youngest children of the family: Keith, Joan and Frank. Now deceased.
- Fred – also served in World War II, in the Navy. Died 2008.
- Keith – 5 years younger than Fred. Lived in Morwell. Now deceased.
- Joan – lives in Queensland
- Frank – married Lorraine, died playing golf.

The following discussion with Fred Barlow was recorded in 1987 by his daughter-in-law, Joan. Fred's wife, Gwladys, and his son Jeff (Joan's husband) were also involved.

Jeff, Gwladys, Glenda and Fred Barlow. St Albans High School Deb Ball, 1960.

Fred Barlow: When I was growing up we lived at Moorabbin before we moved to Mordialloc but my first memories are of Mordialloc. I went to Mordialloc State School. My parents were buying our first house and when I was about 7 it was the first time Dad was out of work. He was a Felt Cutter at the Fairfield Hat Mills at Abbotsford. He used to come home at night and we'd go up to meet him and he had his Gladstone bag and he always used to bring home a quarter of a sandwich with bits of tobacco on it and we'd fight over that. Sometimes we used to go down to the beach for tea, in the hot weather. I made my first fishing line there, with a ball of string with a hook. A bigger boy showed me how to do that.

About 1927 we left Mordialloc in Melrose Street. Keith was born there. Dad was out of work again, and we went to Richmond. I can't remember the name – it was down near Brighton Street in a side street in a dingy little house. I don't remember how long we stayed there but I went to Brighton Street State School[1] and we were there approximately 12 months. We then went to Corsair

[1] Now called Richmond Primary School.

Street, Richmond. I did a paper round in Bridge Road and it was there that Dad disappeared, when he first left home. I was about 8. No explanation was given; Mum just said "Your father's gone". I don't remember my reaction. He never worked again after he was dismissed from Fairfield Hat Mills; he'd just lie in bed all day. He had a special little room out the back of Corsair Street, a shed out the back. He must have left before Corsair Street because he came back and lived in the shed and that's when Mum got pregnant with Frankie.

Then we moved to Yarra Street, Abbotsford, and that's when we first started out as Catholic. I went to the Convent of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford. Dad appeared again in Yarra Street for about a week and we were in Yarra Street for about two years and then he disappeared and I never saw him again. Daisy said she thought she saw him one day sitting on a seat in the Exhibition Gardens but she wasn't sure so she didn't go over to him.

When we left there we went to Rutland Street and I went to the Victoria Park State School for the last six months of my school life and that was the end of my school life. I must have been 13 or 13½ and went to work. My first job I had was woodcarving. I was an apprentice to a wood carver who did old-fashioned woodcarving on bedheads like we've got in our bedroom now, also at the backs of sideboards and rope edging around tables. It lasted about 4 months and the Department of Labour came and decided they had too many apprentices. They had 3 senior workers and about 6 apprentices and they should only have had 1:1 or 1:2 or whatever the number was. Four apprentices were put off and I was one of them.

I then went to an engineering place in Cromwell Street and worked there just on 12 months and I was put off because things got slack. Things like that were happening at that particular time everywhere because in 1933/34 it was the depression. I was getting 10 shillings. I was only getting 7/6 at the wood carvers and I paid Mum 5/- of it. Then I went down to Yarra Falls and worked there for 2 years until I joined the navy. I was nearly 18 when I joined in October 1938. I did 3 months "boys' time", which was 35 shillings a fortnight, because I wasn't yet 18.

In the meantime, we didn't see Dad again so Mum went to work, I sold papers and the others sold papers or did odd jobs to keep us going. We used to line up at 5 in the morning at shoe factories to get leather clippings - we called them "Collingwood Cakes" - that were left over from cutting the soles of shoes. We used to take sugar bags or any old bags we had, we took the old pram and filled it up with the leather scraps for heating. We'd

go to the rail siding to get mallee roots if we could jump the fence. If we couldn't, we used to get through the fence palings and take briquettes. Mum would wake us up at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and we used to fill up the pram with briquettes. There was no dole money in those days; you got food vouchers and they used to come around with firewood. They had depots and you used to go to the Depot with your food vouchers and get whatever groceries there was at that particular time. I remember there was always Myra plum jam and we got that in 5-pound tins.

Do you remember feeling as though you didn't have much?

Everyone didn't have much because where we lived in Fitzroy, Collingwood, Richmond, it was an industrial area. South of the Yarra and the country properties, they were all right: country properties because they had their own cattle and south of the Yarra was where the rich people lived. How many rich were left I don't know.

On Sunday mornings we'd go down to the Salvation Army Tabernacle in Wellington Street and get fishpaste sandwiches and a cup of cocoa for breakfast and then at lunch-time from school we'd go to St Phillips alongside the Collingwood Town Hall and they'd put on a hot lunch, usually mashed potatoes and saveloys. *(Would your Mum go too?)* No, it was just the kids from school and we'd offer to wash the dishes and we'd get whatever saveloys were left over and we'd divide it up amongst the kids and get the mashed potato that was left over and take that home.

Then Mum got a job. There used to be a hotel on the corner of Wellington Street and Johnston Street,[1] and she got a job there as a cook. The Collingwood Club footballers used to go there on a Saturday night. I used to sell papers outside the hotel in Hoddle Street and the kitchen windows led onto Hoddle Street and Mum would do a parcel of food and pass it out the window and I'd run around the corner with it – Keith brought this up the other day – the kids would sit at home and I'd run around into Harmsworth Street and they'd eat theirs and I ate mine on the corner and mum would have hers in the kitchen.

Daisy was gone by this time and Jimmy was working in the bush. You had to have one member of the family working to get the "Sustenance". If you didn't have anyone working, the father had to work, or the oldest child, to

[1] Possibly referring to Johnston and Hoddle streets.

get the vouchers. Well, Jimmy was working at Geelong at this time; I think he was cutting railway sleepers or something but he was gone and Daisy was gone. He was the eldest boy and Daisy the eldest girl was gone. I think she was over in Adelaide working as a presser.

Anyway, we'd moved from Rutland Street to Easey Street and then from Easey Street to Harmsworth Street. Every time the rent came due we used to scrape up one week's rent. You had to pay one week's rent before you went into the house, then you'd go into the house then you wouldn't pay anymore until they evicted you. And then you'd move until you got another week's rent and moved on – there were plenty of empty houses. You'd move out till the next 6 months or whatever for as long as you possibly could live there until they kicked you out again.

From there I joined the Navy. In October 1938 I went down to Port Melbourne to join up and that's when I first met Jeff, Gwlad's brother, and Niffy Harris. I was the first one there, then Jeff came in and Niffy came in; the three of us together. We went down to the Depot. The first meal we had was cold tripe and onions and custard slice with jelly on the top. I remember the meal because I had about five helpings. Jeff got sick of eating it so he passed me his plate. We'd had nothing all day. We had about a pound each for pocket money and we were there about 5 or 6 weeks before we got any pay.

Was this the merchant navy?

No, this was the Royal Australian Navy down at Flinders Naval Depot. We went down to Port Melbourne for the medical and then took the oath there and then were sent down to the Flinders Naval Depot as fully-fledged sailors.

Did you know there was going to be a war at this stage?

Well, we didn't know for sure but the September before (we were called up in the October) was when Germany had invaded Czechoslovakia and they invaded Poland the following September and that's when war broke out, 12 months later. We joined then and then we are called up.[1]

What does it mean "we joined and then we were called up"?

[1] Dates not correct. Germany invaded Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and Poland on 1st September 1939. War was declared on 3 September 1939.

Well, we joined the Navy and we were then put on the waiting list. They didn't need sailors when I first joined up. Mum first tried to get me into the navy - all I ever wanted from when I was about 9 was to be a sailor. She tried to get me into the merchant navy with John Hollands as a cabin boy and she put my name down when I was 15 and we never heard anything. We still hadn't heard anything when I was 17, so I said I'll join the Navy, and we went down and put my name down for the Navy and we never heard anything from them either.

What interested you that you wanted to be at sea?

I don't know. I don't even know to this day. Unless it was that we'd lived at Mordialloc for my earlier years and I spent a lot of time around the boats and the creek and used to go out with the fellow who used to hire the boats out. I used to help him wash the boats out and I'd go with him every now and again. Whether it was that and I just got a liking for the sea, I just don't know.

It must have been a pretty happy time for you at Mordialloc.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. In childhood, that was the happiest of all, even though there were lots of blues in the house. Dad used to come home "full", would wield a big black belt about 3 inches wide. He used to pull it off and lam into everybody with it and we'd all race out the back door. He'd throw his dinner against the wall. He was a violent man, extremely violent.[1] He'd go off at the drop of a hat, but whether he was always full I don't know.

I used to have to go down every night to the hotel to get a quart bottle of beer for seven pence. I'd have to go down to the pub every night and have it ready before he got home and that's where I sold my first dog. I took it down to the bar and sold it for sixpence and when the buyer was taking it home I'd whistle and the dog would take off and then we'd sell it down the other hotel, the Bridge Hotel, a couple of nights later.

I always got sixpence for the dog. We sold it about four times until they would see us coming and they'd say 'Don't buy the bloody dog, because it takes off."

[1] Later family research discovered that Fred's father had been an orphan from birth. He was raised in an orphanage in northern England in the early part of the 20th century. From Fred's account of his father's violence towards his family it is apparent that the father had been traumatized by the experience.

Enlisting in the Royal Australian Navy, Flinders Naval Depot 1938
Back row: Fed Barlow, unknown, Jeff Latch, Niffy Harris

We used to pinch pomegranates out the back of the pub. They had a big tree and we'd get pomegranates out of there. The milk, we used to … there were plenty of cows around Mordialloc at the time and we'd milk the cows. We'd lay on our backs under the udder and squirt the milk into our mouths.

There was the Epsom Racecourse.[1] Well we lived in another street, just before the Epsom Racecourse, and I had a shoeshine stand there because the bitumen used to run out about a quarter mile before the racecourse and I used to have my shoeshine stand and as they'd come in from the race-course they'd clean their shoes before they went down to the station. And there were open paddocks they used to have to go through and we used to bind the barbed wire with sacking and you'd hold the bottom strand down with your foot and the top strand with your hand. I'd be on one side and Daisy on the other and we'd hold our hand out like and we'd get a penny for putting them through the wire without tearing their clothes. And after the races were over we'd go and give the caterers a hand and we'd get what was left over – pies, sandwiches or hot dogs, whatever was there. That all supplemented the food, plus we grew vegetables and different things.

I joined the Navy and was in the Navy about three months and we got our first leave and made arrangements to meet Jeff on the Saturday afternoon. We went up on the Friday and that's when I met your Mum, Gwladys. She was out the front sweeping the footpath. We came down and Jeff introduced me to his sister, naturally. We went out that afternoon to Seabourn's.

Gwladys went too?

No, no, she was doing her housework, as usual. We went out to Seabourn's. Dick Seabourn was a mate of Jeff's. Went there and then went to a pub near their place. That night we were going to a party so we came home to Jeff's place. We had tea, at Seabourn's or your place? *(asking Gwlady)* and took you to the party.

What was your first response when you first met Mum? Do you remember?

No, I don't, to tell you the truth. How can I put it? Not a bad drop. I was 18, she was 17. She looked nice in her overall…

Had you had much contact with women?

[1] Now known as the Epsom Training Track

Well, I'd been down at Flinders for three months. I'd had girlfriends naturally, different ones. Your father (*to Gwladys)* said that it was your birthday in two days time, what was I going to give you for your birthday and I gave you a box of chocolates with three Alsatians on it. That was her first birthday present. Took half my pocket money. It was a big box, wasn't it?

What prompted you to buy this strange woman such a big box of chocolates that cost so much money and you'd only known her two days?

Well, looking back in retrospect I don't really know. Probably I was just a kind-hearted lad who took pity on the lass. You never had ulterior motives in those days. Consciously, when her father said it was her birthday, this didn't faze me. I was an arrogant sod and that wouldn't have worried me in the slightest. I think I liked her because obviously I wouldn't have done it.

Anyway, we went back to the Depot after that particular leave, a week I think. We'd finished our training and it was about a fortnight after that; no, it was longer than that, we went over to Hobart to commission the *Hobart*, the first ship. We went to Jervis Bay from Sydney, from Jervis Bay to Hobart, Tasmania, and I was going to desert because I'd been seasick all the way down. They woke me in the middle of the night to work, which upset me. I didn't know the ship kept going of a night. Well, no one told me. So I had the watch from 2 to 4 and the next time I was on 4 to 8 in the morning and I was sound asleep and a bloke woke me up. "Come on, it's your watch". I said, "What for? It's in the middle of the bloody night!" He said, "That's got nothing to do with it. Come on." I said, "I don't work in the middle of the night. What are you talking about?" He said, "Yes, yes you do". So down I went and I said to the Chief Petty Officer, "How long does this go on for?" He said, "All the time you're in the bloody Navy, son. Twelve years." I said, "Geez, I didn't know you had to work in the middle of the night."

I got into a blue the first day down there. Jeff and I nearly got into a real fisticuff. We got into the police office out of the bus; there was Niffy and Jeff and then I. They take all your particulars down and fill them in on your card and he said, "What's your initials and your surname?" I said, "FND Barlow", and he turned around to the Chief Petty Officer and he said, "He's a real smart bastard", because FND is Flinders Naval Depot. He thought I was being facetious and I wasn't because that was me initials. So, he said, "We'll knock that out of you, son", so of course I immediately jumped up and said "You and who else?" and Jeff walked over and asked what was the matter. Of course you're not supposed to do these things. You're

supposed to say “Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir”. We didn’t know anything about that and he said, “Ah, you’re a smart bastard”, and I said, “No, I can look after myself. Just watch yourself.” And Jeff says, “Trouble?” and I said, “No, not yet”, and the fellow said, “I’ll have a talk to you later, son” and I said, “Orright, whatever you like.” He finished signing me in and waved me in, so we went to the Depot and got our clothes, our uniforms, our hammocks and everything started. They showed us how to do it.

Fred Barlow aged 20 years

And two days later this fellow comes along and asked me where I came from. I told him I was from Collingwood and he said he might know me. He was a gunner’s mate – just can’t remember his name. He had a talk to me about the facts of life in the Navy: “You say ‘Yes, sir’, ‘No, sir’ and now you’re just a number and until you’ve finished all your training. Then you go to sea and you start getting your ratings and you can’t beat the Navy, you can’t beat any Service. You’ve got to join them and the higher you get the better off you are. And take a tip from me – don’t stay a stoker. Go for whatever you can get because as you go up the ladder your life becomes easier. Instead of people shoving you all around, you’re shoving everyone else around”. That stuck in me brain, being at a very impressionable age.

So as I said, we went down to Hobart and we came back to Melbourne and I went out to see Gwlady again. I supposedly went out to see her brother, but naturally I went out to see her.

And from there we volunteered to go to England. About June or July 1939 we went over on the steamship *Autolycus;* the chaps called it “Oughta-lick-us” because it was a cargo ship that had been converted to a troop carrier and we lived in the holds. They put in special decks in the holds and we slept in there in our hammocks. Went across there to South Africa. Went to Albany in Western Australia then to South Africa, to Simonstown, which is the seaport for Cape

Town. Went up to Cape Town and went from there to the Canary Islands, from the Canary Islands to Portsmouth.

Were you excited about seeing all these places?

Oh yeah, naturally, because I'd never been out of Melbourne. I'd never even been to Sydney until I'd joined the Navy. We went to Gibraltar and then to Portsmouth. Then we had four months in England I think it was, commissioning the ship,[1] finishing a re-fit of it and everything else. We went from there to New York. We had 12 days in New York.

Can you remember what it was like? Did you have time to go into the town?

Yes, roughly. We had a mutiny on the way across. We had an English Captain and an English Commander who were a pair of bastards and we all jacked up when we got to New York. The New York papers screamed about an Australian ship mutiny, machine guns trained on the sailors and all the rest of it, which it wasn't, but it was all a lot of bull. But we did have a mutiny, we refused flat rate to do what they wanted. They took the cushions off the seats in the recreation room, all this sort of business, all this bloody nitpicking. It wasn't necessary.

But while I was in England I went up and met Mum's sister and I think a brother – I'm not quite sure now. And I stayed with them for four days. I had four days leave and stayed with them in Chiswick, just down from the Chiswick Castle,[2] and around the corner was a little pub called "The White Swan". It was a filthy little place so we re-named it "The Dirty Duck".

And then after 3½ to 4 months I think we had in England, we left and went to New York. We had twelve days in New York and we were supposed to go to Kingston in the West Indies, then to San Pedro on the west coast, and from San Pedro to San Francisco and Honolulu, and then to Suva and back to Sydney. Instead of that we got to Kingston, Jamaica, and we got there on the Friday and war broke out on the Sunday morning. That's what we were told on Sunday morning, 8 o'clock, over the loud speakers on the ship. And then we'd been seconded to the British Navy. Kingston, Jamaica, was our head base and we used to go up to Nova Scotia, Canada, pick up

[1] The purpose of the trip was to commission the HMAS Perth into the RAN, which was done on 29 June 1939.
[2] Possibly refers to Chiswick House, London.

the merchant ship convoys out into the Atlantic. The British fleet would come over, pick the ships up from us and then we'd go back to Kingston and take whatever ships they had to Nova Scotia and then we'd go down to Kingston and patrol around there, then go back to Nova Scotia when the next convoy was ready to take another one over.

In the meantime the Battle of the Graf Spee … remember when the Graf Spee got sunk? Well, the Battle started and they called us up to go down to join the fleet that was blockaded in the River Pate.[1] We got about a day's steaming from the River Pate when she blew herself up, this was in December 1939, and then we turned around and went back again.

And how did you feel when war was declared? Was it exciting?

Oh yeah. Whacko! Tremendous! Because we now know, we didn't know anything about bloody war, and we was on a ship and all we were thinking about was blowing up places.

Anyway, we were away for 12 months; we were based in Jamaica for about 9 months and then we came home. We went to Tahiti instead of Honolulu because that was an American port and they weren't into the war at that time so we couldn't call there; it was a neutral country. So we went to Tahiti which you know is a French possession, and of course the French were fighting the Germans and we had two days at Papeete. We went to Suva in Fiji. We had two days there and then we went back to Sydney.

I went home on leave and met Gwlad again and we went out a few times. I think we had 28 days leave that time, because we'd been away 12 months.

Gwladys: I was in Tassie then, wasn't I?

No, you went after we'd left to go to the Mediterranean Sea, which was in 1940. You went to Tassie in '41 wasn't it?

Gwladys: I can't remember.

Because you was there when I came home in 1943. No, you'd come back to Melbourne. So it must have been '41 when you went to Tassie because it was '43 when you came back to Melbourne and you were 20 then and

[1] Rio de la Plata, Argentina.

that was two years later.

We were heading for the Middle East and we took a convoy to Perth first. We were in Perth for a fortnight and picked up a convoy of troops, the *Queen Mary*, the *Queen Elizabeth* and I think it was the *Bremen*: three of the biggest ships in the world at that particular time. And we took them over to the Middle East; up through the Suez Canal and unloaded all the Australian troops at Alexandria and then we joined up with the Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria. We were taken over by the British Navy again.

No trouble getting up the Red Sea or anything? No shooting or anything?

No, not at that particular time. Because this was early in the piece, before Japan had come into it. We went through the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal to Alexandria, and we were stationed in Alexandria. Well, that is when the war really got under way. The Germans invaded North Africa and Tobruk got isolated and we were on the Tobruk run and then we took the troops over for the [German] invasion of Greece. We were in Greece for two, three weeks and we landed the troops and then we went to Malta. We were doing the convoys across the Mediterranean from Alexandria to Malta, taking in supplies. And then we evacuated the troops from Greece, unloaded them at Crete and we got into the fighting at Crete and we evacuated Crete and we brought them back to Palestine and Alexandria.

Scary, when you were under fire?

Of course; because in those days we had no air cover. We were being bombed continuously in daylight hours. Sometimes in the night hours a bomber would come over and bomb on the wake, because the seas were phosphorous. When you see the wake of a ship and you see white, well in the night that becomes phosphorous and you can see it from the sky. It becomes just like a trail and they used to bomb down on that. But we were in a lot of action over there, in a big sea battle. We sank a couple of Italian cruisers and we helped in the sinking of them – we were in the fleet that sunk them. And we picked up a lot of survivors. And we sank a submarine; all sorts of things.

Then it was a full-scale war – it wasn't fun anymore. Every time you went to sea there were ships blown up around you and we were picking up survivors, all this sort of thing. The *Formidable* got hit with three 3000lb bombs and we went over and cleaned it up, scraped crew off the walls, bagged them up in

shovelfuls and all this sort of thing.[1]

All up we spent three years there. I was there about 18 months, just over 12 months and the *Perth* was going home and she was leaving at 12 o'clock on the Friday, and at 9 o'clock I got a transfer off it to the HMAS Vendetta, which was a destroyer. I was on the *Vendetta* for 12 months and she went home and I went to the *Nizan*[2].

I was over there three years all together and the *Nizan* then came out of the Mediterranean because things had picked up. We'd cleared out of North Africa and the invasion of Italy was on. Then we went into the Indian Ocean because Japan looked like it would, then did, come into the war. We went down into the Indian Ocean and we were stationed at Mombassa[3] in East Africa. We went back into the Mediterranean to do a convoy and had a near miss and had a boiler room blown out. We went to Bombay[4] and we were there 6 months doing repairs. Then we went back to South Africa again and we convoyed ships around the Cape of Good Hope.

So then I came home after three years on the *Nizan*. I came home on the 1st April 1943, I was on duty the first two nights in port, went off on the 3rd April, and that's when I met Gwlady again.

Had you written to her in between time?

Yes, on the way back. But we didn't write for what - about two years? - when I first went away. 18 months to 2 years.

Did you regard her as your girlfriend at that point?

No, just a friend. Well, actually it was the family more than Gwlady and I that kept in touch. Jeff went back on the *Perth* and we heard that the *Perth*

[1] On 30 May 1941 with over 6,000 evacuees from Crete the *Perth* took a direct hit by a bomb, but fortunately for Fred it penetrated the second engine room and not the one where he was working. Repairs were done in Alexandria. Fred was transferred in July 1941. In March 1942 the *Perth* was sunk by the Japanese in the Java Sea and Jeff (Gwladys's brother) was captured and was a prisoner in Thailand for the remainder of the war, working on the infamous Thai/Burma railway.
[2] N class destroyer, launched 4th July 1940.
[3] Coast of what is now Kenya
[4] Mumbai

had been sunk while we were in the Mediterranean and I think that's when I first wrote back to the family.

Gwladys: You wrote back and it was Gwen who kept up the correspondence. I stopped writing because I got engaged to Ron.

Oh, that's right, yeah. Anyway, I got back on the 1st April, met Gwlady on the 3rd April and we started to go out together. And then we got engaged on the 7th April, '43, and then we got married on the 7th April.
Gwladys: I was in Tassie then, when you came back.

No, you were in Melbourne. Remember …

Gwladys: I was engaged.

Remember …

Gwladys: Oh, you sent a telegram home to Mum and Mum replied to you, you were going to Tassie looking for me.

But then Niffy Harris went into the milk bar or restaurant where you worked in Swanston Street and someone said to you the next day when you went in there. Niffy was on his own – I was on duty. She said Petty Officer Keith Harris came in to see you.

Gwladys: She didn't know his name. She said he had a peaked cap on and I said the only boys I know on the Nizan are Keith Harris and Fred Barlow.

And then I went home. You was at my place.

Gwladys: Mum, she told me. When I went, she said, "What do you want?" because I hadn't – I didn't like Mrs Barlow then.

So we got engaged on the 7th and we got married on the 17th.

If you didn't regard her as your girlfriend, why get engaged so quickly?

Well, coming home I said to Niffy Harris, I think I'll ask Gwlad to marry me.

Gwladys: And he said, "If you don't, I will."
Yes, he said, "I was going to do that", and I said, "You're too young to get

married." He was older than me – 6 months. Because Niffy and I were still together then. We'd been together from the day we joined up. This was 4 years later. We were like brothers.

So, we came home, we got married and I went down to the Depot. My leave finished at the end of the month and I went down to the Depot and did the Petty Officer's course at Depot. And Gwlad was working at a factory in Abbotsford. A mica factory, wasn't it?

Gwladys: Yeah, working on aeroplane lines.

Daisy was working at the same place. Was she living with Mum and Jack?

Gwladys: No, she came back from Adelaide when we were on our honeymoon. Remember, she kissed and hugged you.

Fred Barlow aged 22 years

She was working there with Daisy. When I was down at Depot, a lot of the sailors used to live at Frankston in private homes and one of what they used to call the "sailors' homes" was in Birdwood Street, Frankston. And a fella said to me, "You live in Melbourne, don't you, Fred?" I said, "Yes". He said, "Didn't you just get married?" I said, "Yes". He said, "Would you like to live in Frankston?" and I said, "Tremendous," because living in Frankston meant you could get leave for a night time, when living in Melbourne you could only come up of a weekend. So I thought that would be tremendous but I said, "Where am I going to get a house?" and he said, "I'm moving out, I've got a draft to sea. You can take our place".

What they used to do: you took the house over and paid the rent in the first bloke's name. It was probably in 1920 or something like that when the first sailor took the house over, and you weren't bloody supposed to hand the house over, but all sailors were the same to the estate agent I suppose. As

one moved out another would move in, but you just kept paying the rent under the same name. I've even forgotten what the name was. Anyway, we moved in and we were there four, five, six months. You were pregnant[1] when we moved there. Then I went to sea again. Gwlady went back to Tasmania to be with her mother.[2]

Gwladys: Because I was on my own.

So coming back to Seaford is a bit like coming home for you.

Gwladys and Fred: Yeah.

Early childhood at Mordialloc, early married years here.

Anyway, we moved in. Then when I went to sea again Gwlad went to Tasmania and I went on the *Arunta*, and went around the islands in South East Asia and was in all the landings and battles around the islands in '44. And then when Jeff was born – a week after he was born – I got leave, we came down to do a refit in Sydney and I got leave to come home and went over to Tassie, and I was in Tasmania about a week when Mum died.

Gwladys: Keith sent a telegram.

Yes, Keith sent a telegram, "Come home immediately, Mum's dying," or died.

What did she die of?

Cancer. But she'd been dying for 18 months, 2 years. I couldn't get transport home because it was like the war years and troops had all the priorities and there was no civilian transport, or hardly any at all across from Tasmania. Anyway, Mum died while I was in Tasmania.

So that was early '44?

Yes, about the middle of February, because Jeff was over a week old when I came home. So it would have been about the second week of February.

[1] This was in 1943 and Gwladys was pregnant with their firstborn child, Jeff, who was born in January 1944. Fred remained in the RAN until 1947.
[2] Gwladys's father, Henry Latch, was moved to Hobart by the Australian Government to work in the munitions industry.

Did that affect you much, her dying? You didn't have much of a relationship with her?

I don't remember it affecting me greatly.

Gwladys: No, he didn't even cry.

She was like a stranger.

Gwladys: He just put his arms around me and buried his head into my chest and I thought, 'He's really going to break up now', but he didn't.

No. You see, I'd been away so long and more or less lived away from home … not lived away from home, but even when we were kids most of our time was spent in the street or spent away from the house. There was nothing at the house for us. It's not like today with TV and the affluent society. You made your own fun out in the street. You had an old tyre for a hoop, played football, and you had what they called a "tip cat" - a piece of wood sharpened at both ends and you hit it with a stick to see who could belt it the farthest down the street. Or you were down the river swimming. You was off with your mates.

Everyone was in gangs in those days. Five or six mates; you'd all congregate and meet together and congregate together and go off together to places. We'd walk to Port Melbourne and St Kilda for a swim at the beach or we'd go down to the Yarra, to the Dights Falls Swimming Club and all this sort of thing. But everything was outdoors and it used to be 11 o'clock most nights when I got home and then I'd go straight to bed and I'd get up in the morning and go straight to work. I'd come home at night, have my tea and off I'd go out into the street again with me mates. And Saturdays, the weekends was taken up, in the latter years of course I was working, but in the schooldays years I was selling papers and Records or whatever, collecting bottles at the football and sell lollies at half-time, sell sweets at the pictures at night and all this sort of thing.

But home was just a place to sleep. That's why I said to Loueen the other day: that home can be a house or a home. We never had homes; we had houses because all you did was sleep there. There was nothing in the house. Mum was rarely home because she was out doing odd jobs, and when she wasn't out doing odd jobs, she was down at the Sustenance Depot trying to get a handout, trying to get clothes. She was around

battling for her kids. Whatever she could do. And we never saw much of anybody. I used to look after most of the young ones in those days when I was first a teenager, so …

Look after them in what way?

Well, get their meals, see they got to bed, had a wash, clean their teeth, whatever they were supposed to do. And then, so actually as far as family life was concerned, it was, as I said, there was very little of it.

Do you remember anytime when you had close contact with your mother?

Not physical contact.

Or times, just sitting and talking?

No, not really. There was no … most of my childhood memories are of the street. You know, it was spent on the street, either selling papers or out with my mates. Or, as I said, at the football. We used to go down to the football ground. Keith Austin's father was the boot studder and we used to go down there and clean the footballers' boots with sticks, getting the mud out from around the stops, polishing the boots. And Saturday night we'd be at the pub cleaning up the tables after they'd had their tea. Then I'd go out and sell me Records, Sporting Globes and papers and all that sort of thing. The house, as I said, was a house. It was there and you slept in it, but as far as living in it was concerned, you spent most of your time away from the house.

Gwladys: Your dad took you to the beach.

Yes, as I said, in the early years at Mordialloc we'd go down there some nights for tea and then he'd sit on the beach with his quart of beer and have tea with Mum, and the kids used to play on the beach, like normal kids – five, six, seven, whatever it was. But those nights were few and far between because he was too tired by the time he got home. He didn't want to do anything more: he'd been up town, worked hard all day in a factory. You used to work 8 or 9 hours in those days, with half an hour for lunch. Then he'd come home all the way by train again to Mordialloc from Abbotsford. I suppose by the time he got home he was buggered.

He had a crystal wireless set. He used to sit with the headphones on, and you wouldn't dare to move or breathe 'cause if there was a crackle of the

paper it would upset the crystal and nobody could hear. He'd have one earphone on and she'd have the other, if he was particularly generous, and us kids would sit there, "What's happened? What's happened? What are they doing? What's going on?" And then for a rare treat you'd get a listen. You'd listen to the music with your earphone.

And then we went back. I left Tasmania at the end of leave, 28 days, back to Sydney and joined the ship again and went back north. I got transferred to the *Warrnambool*, a minesweeper up near New Guinea. We went around the islands and were the advance party for most of the invasions, minesweeping the harbours before the troop ships went in to land the troops. While I was up there I got chronic eczema and came home to Sydney. They flew me down to Sydney on a plane. I was in bed for about six weeks up in New Britain and they flew me down to a naval wing in Sydney.

You must have been pretty bad. Was it all over your body?

I never had any skin. I was just weeping the whole of my body and they stuck me up with calamine lotion. They used to put thick calamine lotion and I wasn't allowed to wash it off: between one-eight and one-quarter inch thick and it used to crack at the joints and the fluid used to weep out. I was a mess, a real mess. And I was in hospital for about 9 or 10 months.

All the time?

Yeah. Full-time at the naval wing at Randwick. The war had finished but we were mine sweeping, clearing the mines up after the war. Because I got my discharge from the Randwick naval wing. I came home in the November '46 because I was discharged in February '47.

What were you doing in hospital all that time? Just getting your eczema right?

Just getting cured, because they had to rebuild all the skin. They had to clear the eczema up and then I had to grow skin over. They put coal tar and zinc cream on me from head to toe and I eventually got better. The war was over then and they were trying to get as many servicemen out of the forces as they possibly could and they put me down as category: "Unfit for naval service in tropical areas" because that's when it breaks out. You're out in the sun and you perspire or you're wet in the joints. And so they sent me down to Melbourne for discharge. And I came down in the November and I had 28 days leave and then I was supposed to go back

from leave and be discharged in the second week in December.

A mate of mine was the Master of Arms down at Port Melbourne and he said, "You've come down for discharge?" after we'd had a talk and I said, "Yes", and he said, "When are you due for discharge?" and I said, "I've got 28 days and then I've got to come back", and he said, "Well, it's no good you being discharged before Christmas because everything closes down over Christmas, all the factories, and you won't get a job". So he said, "You better go off and come back at the end of January". So I said, "Orright," and fortunately I did get a job. Gwlad's brother worked at Smorgons and he got me a job on the chain, labouring on the chain. So I said, all right, I'll take that for the holiday period until I get discharged and go and get a job as a boiler attendant because I had a Boiler Attendant's Certificate.

And after I worked at Smorgons I went and got my discharge in January and looked around for boiler attendant jobs and they were all shift work, night work, and didn't pay as much as I was getting labouring on the chain. So by that time we had Jeff and Glenda,[1] and Gwlad and I were living in the bungalow at the back of her mother's place in Nixon St, Sunshine. So I kept working at Smorgons, kept looking for another job as a boiler attendant, but as I said, it didn't turn out suitable and I finished up spending 10 years there, at Smorgons, on the chain.

The following transcript of discussions with Fred Barlow was made in December 2005 by his son, Jeff Barlow. At this time Gwladys Barlow had passed away and Fred was in a nursing home in Frankston.

What happened between the time you left the Navy and when you went to St Albans in 1949?

Well, I left the navy in 1947 and we were staying in a bungalow at the back of the wife's people in Nixon Street, Sunshine. We stayed there for a while but later we got lodgings over at a place in Argyle Street, Moonee Ponds, and we stayed there for quite some time. But the landlady wasn't very pleasant so we moved next door. I worked with Dick, who was the nephew of the lady next door to this boarding house, and she let us put a caravan in her back yard.

Were all the kids there then?

[1] Glenda was born in November 1945 and was just over one year old when Fred was discharged from the RAN in February 1947.

No, we only had two then still. Still only had two. I was still working at Smorgons. We had two rooms there in Moonee Ponds and a bitch of a landlady and she put us out or we got out, one of the two or a mixture of both.[1] And we went next door into the caravan. The lady next door to this boarding house let us put a caravan in her back yard. Spicer was their name. We lived in this caravan for about 9 months. We had a sheet of canvas from the roof over to a shed and that was about 6 feet wide. That was our annexe and Gwlad used to cook in it. Then we got a housing commission house over in Richelieu Street, Maidstone.

When we moved to Maidstone we never had much in the way of furniture or anything else, so we got our first lounge suite when Rimfire won the Melbourne Cup. I was fortunate enough to get it in the sweep and I won £30. One of the fellows I was working with at Smorgons was telling me about a block of land he bought out at St Albans.

When did you start working at Smorgons?

As soon as I got out of the navy.

So you weren't doing any boiler making at that stage?

No. I got out of the navy in November and Jeff Latch and his brother Brian[2] said to me, "Well, you're not going to get a job anywhere else over Christmas because everything closes down." So he said, "Come with me and I'll see if I can get you on at Smorgons." Which he did, and George Smorgon said to him "Yes, send him out and I'll start him on Monday." So I went out on the Monday and I started on the 'chain',[3] on what they call the 'spreader'. I finished up working there for ten years. I was only going to go there over the holidays, but I was earning good money there, so I couldn't see any point in leaving. To get a boilermaker's job … I had a boiler attendant's certificate and I also had a machinist certificate but they paid less money than I was getting as a butcher-slaughterman at Smorgons.

[1] They left due to the landlady's cruelty to the children Jeff and Glenda.
[2] Jeff and Brian were brothers of Gwladys.
[3] The 'chain' was the name given to the whole process of slaughtering a sheep and then hanging it on a moving metal track about 2 metres high. There would be men spread out along this track or 'chain' who had specific tasks to do in the process of preparing the slaughtered carcass for the cool room.

So when my workmate told me about this block of land he'd bought for £50, I said that sounds fair enough to me, and I went out and had a look at the land and then bought a block. I then took the wife out to see the block and she nearly fainted. It was through waist-high grass from the St Albans railway station round to Percy Street. That was the street that Sands' place used to run off. It took us half an hour to find the pegs that marked out the block. But anyway, as I said to her, she wanted a house and this was the best that we could afford. There was a builder up there who'd started building homes around St Albans, and I had a talk to him and he said he could put me up a three-bedroom, weatherboard home for £1,400. So I signed up with him, but I don't remember his name; it would still be on the plans. I signed up for the house and it had all the mod cons, including a copper and a hot water service.

Was it wood-fired? Because we didn't have gas out there.

I don't think it was electric, so it must have been wood-fired. There was no septic sewage; there was an outside chemical toilet to start with. There was no water laid on and no gas. Ken Mansfield had a house behind us and he let us connect up a hose to his outdoor water tap. We had a 44 gallon drum at the back door on a stand with a tap in it and we used to fill the 44 gallon drum up and use the water as we required it.

What was the area like in terms of roads and lights?

There were no roads and no street lights.

This must be around the end of 1949 when you went there?

I can't really recall the exact day, but we looked at the plans and it was about six months after we got the plans.

I think you said on another occasion that Mum was pregnant with Steven, and he was born in February 1950, and you moved in before he was born, so it would have been late '49.

Late '49. The mail was delivered on horseback by Mr. Eric Perrett. Self Brothers and Goddard had a little country store and a milk bar alongside. They were the two main shops: there was a butcher shop and Eric Perrett's little store in which he had the post office attached to. I think it was Hampton who had a clothing store on the corner of the main street, Main Road East.

We eventually got street lighting. The wife's biggest thrill was getting the hot water service. When she spoke about the house to anybody she should say "and do you know that I only have to turn the tap and I've got hot water." We never had refrigeration at the time; we had an ice-chest, for which Self Brothers and Goddard used to deliver the ice in the back of a covered-in truck.

Where did the money come from to buy the land and build a house?

That was deferred pay that I got from the navy. Today it would be called superannuation, but the navy called it deferred pay in those days. We managed to hang on to that because I worked all the time so we wouldn't have to dig into that. The mother-in-law[1] wanted me to buy a motor car so I could take her out on the weekend, but we resisted the temptation - plus the fact that I didn't know how to drive anyway. I was 34 before I got a licence.

How old were you when you first went to St Albans in 1949?

I was 23 when I got married in 1943, so I was 29 in 1949.

That would have been with two children and one on the way, because I was born in 1944, so I was nearly 5 years of age when we went to St Albans, and Glenda was 22 months younger.

Then Steve was born in early February, so we must have moved in prior to Steven being born. We must have moved in before Christmas, I would say.

Who were some of the neighbours when you moved in?

The Tullies lived over the road. Ernie Tully worked at ICI over in Deer Park. He had one boy whose name was Keithy. The mother died early. Of course, there was Ken Mansfield and he lived at the back of us. There was no one who lived on the block alongside.

Ken had a son, didn't he?

Yes; can't think of his name. The Brotchies and the Sands lived over the road from me, and the Mansfields in Lyall Street, not Percy Street. The Joneses lived three blocks up from us. Smiths lived around the corner from

[1] Mrs Nellie Latch, who was living in Sunshine at the time.

them and over the road from where the Joneses lived – his boy got killed in Tasmania. They were the ones that lived close to us when we first moved in.

When you first went out to St Albans to seek a block, did you go out with Mum to see the land to buy it, or did you go out on your own?

I went out and bought it on my own. In those days the father was the head of the family. He did whatever he wanted to do, more or less. We were living in Maidstone, so I got the bus to Sunshine and the train from Sunshine to St Albans and walked across from the St Albans railway station.

How did you make contact with the guy who sold you the land?

Well, the fellow I was working with at Smorgons gave me his phone number, because when he told I me about the land I said to him, "I think I'll get a block too." So he said "This is the fellow I bought it from" and he gave me his phone number. I think he was an agent. I was still working at Smorgons then, and your mother was working there too. We used to get the train to Footscray and Smorgons used to run a big furniture van as a bus for its workers.

Who would look after the kids when Mum was working? She would have had Steven as a baby, me as a five-year-old and Glenda would have been three.

She wasn't working when we first moved in; that would have been some years later, before Tony was born. I worked at Smorgons for ten years and I then was offered the school-cleaning job, so I became a school cleaner. That was St Albans State School, the first primary school. There was one, big, long building that, I think, had four or five rooms.

That was the Bristol building, the metal building.

Four or five rooms it had. It had a muddy yard; there was very little concrete down. The old wooden building was still there; it had two rooms, I think. I used to set the fires in the winter and had the heaters going for when the kids came in. After a couple of years of that and Smorgons, I was offered a job at the dairy. The dairy was opposite the football ground in Main Road East and I thought I could fit the dairy and the school cleaning in better than I was fitting in with Smorgons. So I left Smorgons and took on the job in the dairy, and I had that and the school cleaning for about 10 years.
Who owned the dairy when you first went there to work?

I can't remember their name. Ivan Skinner was only managing it. Mum went to work there, though I think she first went to work at Selfs to buy curtains for the house, and then after a few years she was working at the dairy and then after that she was working for Donny Martello. Martello had a little milk bar just down from the dairy. She had Tony then and she used to leave him in the Tin Shed[1] at the football ground.

When you went to St Albans and were still working at Smorgons, that must have been quite a haul, to walk from the house to the railway station, catch a train into Footscray and catch a bus to the abattoir. How long did it take you to get in there?

I would leave home about six o'clock in the morning and start work about 7:30.

And how was life in St Albans?

It was hard, but it was happy. We had the best times of our life there. In regards to Christmas, because your mother always knew how to put on a good table and a good spread. At the end of every month, or the last weekend of every month, we used to have family barbecues. We would go somewhere each weekend. There would be Nellie and Con,[2] apart from our family of course, and Jeff[3] and Lauris, Dick and Verna (Dick married Verna).[4] We had 16 years there, and they were good years – hard, hard but good. We had plenty of work and I was doing two or three jobs all the time, but we were there over 16 years.

It must have been pretty tiring for you, doing two or three jobs all the time?

Yes. I used to fall asleep on the train. One night I got on at Footscray and the conductor woke me up – they had a conductor on the train in those days – and when we got to St Albans he woke me up and he said "Where are you going, mate?" I said "St Albans." He said "Well, you better get out

[1] A child-minding centre had been set up in the Tin Shed, a community youth club, which was a corrugated iron Nissen army hut on Errington Reserve with Oriel Jeffries, Bess Haynes, and Gladys Sands in charge.
[2] Nellie and Con Damaskinos. Nellie was Gwladys's sister and her husband, Con, was from the Greek part of Cyprus.
[3] Jeff was Gwladys's older brother who was a prisoner of war of the Japanese in Thailand after the sinking of HMAS Pert off the coast of Java in March 1943.
[4] Verna was Gwladys's sister and her husband, Richard "Dick" Spicer had served in the army during the war.

because you've been up and down five times. You're at St Albans now."

So you had five trips between St Albans and the city.

I was exhausted. And then Mum bought me a bike for Christmas. She lay-byed it and paid it off at two shillings a week.

Do you remember what year that was? (pause) Testing the memory a bit?

Yes, I don't know.[1] But I used to dink Dick to work on the bike. He was working at Smorgons, too. I'd take the bike out from St Albans out to Brooklyn, right through the back area; didn't go down through Footscray but over the back road, we went around there.

That must have been pretty tiring for you?

You were buggered by the time you got to work.

And then you'd do a day's work and dink him back again.

No, he would dink me back. We'd stop at the Sunshine pub and have a couple of beers and a pie, then we'd go to the football ground and train for footy.

You and Dick were playing in the St Albans football club? When did you start playing there?

I think I was 34. [About 1954]

So about five years after you moved to St Albans, you started playing with the football team.

The stationmaster said to me one day when I got off the train, "Would you come in the office and talk to me for a minute. I want to talk about the football team." So I went into his office and I said "How can I help you?" He said "We are looking for a tall bloke for a ruckman, and you're a big fellow." I said "What about Lance Self?" He said, "Yes, I've got Lance, he's going to try it too." I said, "Alright" and he said "What about your brother-in-law?" Everybody knew everybody in St Albans. "What about your brother-in-law?" I said, "You will have to ask him yourself." Dick said he would have a go. I

[1] Around 1952/3.

think we played for two years, and Footscray Football Club …

Apparently in those days if you played with the Footscray District League, which St Albans came under, you had to sign up with Footscray. So we went down there one night – the whole team had to attend - and we got down to the Footscray rooms and the secretary was signing everybody up.

When I got to the table I said to him "You're wasting your time signing me" and he said, "Oh no, you've got to play with us." I said, "I'm 36 years old and there's not much point in signing me up; I'll be finishing at the end of this year." He said "I'm sorry, but I have to sign everybody." So he signed Dick and I up.

So when you were playing for St Albans it must have been between 1954 and '56.

Must have been. We played every Saturday and then we had a 9 gallon keg on the Sunday. We'd go down and tap the keg to raise funds on Sunday.

Who used to come to those gatherings?

The footballers and their families. Mum would come over and then go home and cook a Sunday roast, and then she'd bake. Sunday was her bake day. She used to make all those sort of things.

Who were some of the teams you played against?

West Footscray, Seddon, Maidstone, I think Keilor; I've forgotten. All the teams from the local area.

Do you remember any of the guys you used to play football with?

Mousie Priest, Dick, of course, and Mousie's brother. Lance Self and Dudley Self played a few games. I think Dudley's dead now, and his brother Norm died, and Alf Goddard died.

Did you enjoy playing football?

I loved any sport. I played rugby with Footscray seconds after I finished playing with St Albans. I was playing rugby at the same time as I was playing Aussie Rules – I would play on a Sunday afternoon.

No wonder you got tired and fell asleep in the train: riding your bike from St Albans to Braybrook working an eight-hour day there, riding your bike back, and training twice a week.

Laying concrete at home, building the shed, putting in the fernery … (laughs) There was no end to it. But as I said, it was hard but it was enjoyable. We had good times then.

What did you do for your social life, apart from the family events that you held once a month?

We'd go to the pictures at Sunshine. I think there was a dance at St Albans. Apart from that we'd have parties of a Saturday night at different people's houses. I had a party for you to go away with 'Doc', and with Steven when he went with Doc.[1]

So you would have been one of the typical male providers in those days, where basically your position in the family was to go out and work really hard and bring in the money and when you were home you were doing building work and improvements around the house.

Put up the garage, laid the path from the front, laid the path down the side of the house, concreted the side, and concreted the fernery out the back.

There was a patio out the front as well, that you did.

We got into the budgies; had cages everywhere. We had chooks out the back and little chook eggs.

You had chooks and ducks and ferrets.

Yes, we had ferrets. We used to go rabbiting.

When did you have time to do rabbiting?

(Laughs) Don't ask me! Don't ask me.

[1] Tom "Doc" Walsh was history teacher from St Albans High School who had an amateur dramatic group outside of school hours. He would organise trips around Australia to tour the plays that the schoolboys acted in. They had fund-raising events and Fred is referring to these.

So tell us about rabbiting. What would you do?

We'd take the ferrets out, take Mum, and we'd go out in Dick's truck[1] and take the kids with us. Dick had left Smorgons and was working for his uncle. That was where we had the caravan before we moved to St Albans. The caravan was located in Moonee Ponds in the back yard of Dick Spicer's uncle after the family moved out of the rooming house due to the cruelty of the landlady. That was in 1947-48.

When Dick left Smorgons to work for his uncle he had half the business. What he didn't piss against the wall he lost on the horses. Verna gave him five pounds one Saturday to buy food, vegetables and meat for the weekend and week – I think she was pregnant at the time with Ronnie – and she never saw Dick again until Tuesday.

He backed a couple of winners on the Saturday, went to the dogs Saturday night, went round to his uncle's place and slept there, and on Sunday went to another race meeting. Anyway, he blew the lot. I thought she was going to kill him. She said "What are we supposed to eat?" He said, "Don't worry about it, I'll get some money." He came around and borrowed ten pounds off me. (laughs) That was all I had. I didn't have that much money in those days. I kept enough just to pay the bills, and the rest I gave to Mum for the housekeeping.

We were talking about rabbiting. You would take ferrets in a truck with Dick …

We'd take the truck and the ferrets and go out all up the back there towards Diggers Rest or Sunbury. We'd find a rabbit warren, block their escape hole and put the ferrets in. Half the time we'd have to dig the ferrets out again. Dick had a great big canvas sheet that he used to put up with a big board that he used to shove up the middle. We would sleep under that. We'd go late on a Saturday afternoon - this was in the summertime when it wasn't the football season. It was in the summertime, and there was always something to do, always.

What was it like being a milkman and how did you see the area grow?

[1] Dick Spicer had married Verna, who was a younger sister of Fred's wife, Gwladys. The truck that Dick drove was used to collect sheep and cattle skins from the abattoirs to transport them to the drying and curing sheds in Kensington.

Well of course the area grew with the half-houses. Do you remember all the half-houses, especially in the east? They were all poor half-houses up there. They used to have the water onto the front of the house, with a lot of them never having the water connected into the house for some reason or other; I don't know why. They used to have their little vegetable gardens where they'd grow pumpkins and cabbages and all those sort of things out the front. They had no paths and they'd leave things in the front. This is when we were delivering the milk to the verandas, but we had to stop that and deliver it to the front gate after we had a lot of falls.

I got a big cut in my arm one time when delivering to the front verandah. Fortunately I was near the doctor's place and I went and knocked on the door. He came to the door in his pyjamas and said "What's the matter" I showed him and he told me to come inside because he had to stitch that up. I went inside and got it stitched and bandaged and went on and finished the round.

This was a cut you received because you fell over in the dark with an armful of milk bottles?

When I fell over I went amongst the broken bottles. It was an awful-looking gash, too. The whole of my hand was fallen back there and you could see the yellow tendon through my wrist. The doctor said he might have to take me down to the hospital, but I said I can't go to the hospital because I have to finish my round. Why I was so conscientious I don't know, except we needed the money, I suppose.

You were using horses in those days?

We used a horse and cart. We'd start at 4 in the morning. We'd go to a party and come home about 2, fall into bed and get up again at 4. Some mornings in the summer I'd come down Percy Street and there'd be Steven and Tony[1] standing on the corner waiting for me. I'd put them on the cart and go down into the dairy, put my second load on, and they'd come round on the second load.

Even Mum came out with me one night when I was crook. That's why I didn't have much time with you kids, because I was working all the time. Work, work, work. Working all the time. I've regretted it in a way over the

[1] Steven and Tony were the two youngest in the family at that time.

years that I did not have more time with the kids, especially after you left home, being the firstborn. You went before I really got to know you.

Although we had quite a lot of time working together at the school, because I used to work there from the age of about 12 or 13 right through till I was about 16, I think.

But even that wasn't fair. Took your childhood away from you.

Well, to some extent it did, because it meant I couldn't participate in sport activities after school, and couldn't have much of a social life with the kids from school, but on the other hand it gave me some pocket money and taught me the value of hard work, and taught me commitment and dedication and perseverance. From that point it was quite positive, although there were negative sides to it as well. It also gave me an opportunity to spend more time with you, which I wouldn't otherwise have had time for. I can remember times when after you got the car, I used to practice driving it when I was about 15 or 16, down the side road near the railway line, not far from the school. You used to allow me to drive the car after a little while down to the main road, and then we'd stop and I'd get out and you'd get in the driver's seat and we'd go home.

I learned to drive in the dairy utility. I was 34 when I got my licence.

You got your first car, which was a Fiat 1100, when? In late 1955?

We went up to Donna Buang in it. It was heavy snow and they were pushing all the cars out. We had the Italian Pirelli tyres on the Fiat, and we drove out without any trouble, and the boys were clapping, Steven and Tony. I think you were there with a mate of yours.

Jack McMillan. He was also a student at St Albans High School for a while and was a good friend. I think he lived in Albion or Sunshine. I am not sure when he left the High School. He was in the play 'Money by Wire' which Doc Walsh took around Australia in 1957, in which I also had a part.

That's right. We went down to the river and saw what we thought was gold glittering, or what we thought was gold, but it was fool's gold.

When you were working in the dairy, what was the first thing you'd do in the morning? Have some hot breakfast or something …?

Electra Drama Group, touring party for Money by Wire. In the centre of the back row are Jimmy and Bill Knowles and Jeff Barlow is next on the right. Jack McMillan is in the middle row seated on the right. 1957

No, I wouldn't have anything to eat. Nothing to eat. I'd get into my overalls and walk up to the dairy. Later on when I got the car, I would sometimes take the car, especially if it was raining. Then I would harness the horse, bring her out and put her into the shafts of the cart, and then take her down to the landing and load her up. But she knew the round better than me. We'd be going along, and if I'd been to a party or something I'd fall asleep on the cart. We'd get to the next place - and some of the places were quite a bit of a drive between them – and if I'd fallen asleep and didn't get off at the house Kate (the horse) would stop, stamp her feet, look round at me and neigh, as much as to say "What the hell are you waiting for?" (laughs)

So the milk was stored in the refrigerator at the dairy and you used to load the cart by yourself. Was there someone there to help you?

No. You'd load it up yourself.

How would you know how much milk they needed?

Well, they'd put the empty bottles out and whatever number of bottles was there was how many you left.

And how did you record who got what?

You memorised it. I had a good memory and was good with figures.

So when you finished your milk round you'd … ?

I'd come back, clean the stall out, hose it out, and put down fresh straw, put the horse in, feed her, fill her water, and then I'd go and book in. There was a big book in which we would register sales to the customers, who got what.

So you would have seen quite a development in St Albans from 1949 to 1964, when you left.

Oh yes. It grew in leaps and bounds.

And you were working in the primary school for quite a while at the same time. How did you get that job in the primary school?

One of the school committee men asked if I would be interested in taking over because the school cleaner had left. I asked what it would involve and

all the rest of it. I was still at Smorgons then. As I said, I worked at Smorgons for ten years. I also worked for Self Brothers and Goddard; I used to work there Fridays and Saturday mornings delivering their fruit and veggies and their groceries. I worked for the dairy for ten years. Someone said to me "You must be 150 years old." I said "No, I've just done it all at once."

It must have been a way to bring in quite a bit of money, if you were doing two or three jobs.

That's how we got the car and the caravan, and the house the way it was: wall-to-wall carpet when other places had bare floorboards. Mum's drapes and whatever she wanted I tried to get for her. Because we never had anything in all our lives, her and I.

What was a typical workday for you at the school?

I'd come home from the milk round, have a shower, and have breakfast. By this time it was about eight o'clock. I'd have a cereal breakfast and toast, probably; that is normally what I have eaten for years. Then I used to go to the school and light the fires.

You had kerosene heaters in some of the Bristol buildings.

In some of them. Then I would clean the toilets about half past nine. This meant hosing down the urinals and wiping over the seats; I think they were stainless steel, from memory, or at one time they were anyway. Then I'd come home and, if any jobs were needed doing around to help your mother, I would do that. Then I would get to bed at about 12 o'clock. I'd sleep to about half past three before Mum would wake me up. I'd go back up the school then and clean the school out, sweep the rooms, scrape the mud out.

The headmaster said to me one time, "A couple of the teachers are complaining, Fred. They say the rooms are not very clean." I asked who they were and he told me. I went round to see the teachers before they left. The kids had gone home but the teachers were still there doing paperwork, checking papers, sitting at the table. I walked in and went up to this bloke.

"I suppose you've been complaining about the room not being very clean."

"Well, it wasn't the best, Fred."

“Have a look at this,” I said, and there’s pens and rulers on the floor as well as papers and mud.

“Yeah,” he replied, “it’s your job to clean it up.”

“I’ll tell you what. I’ll clean it up tonight, but if it’s like that again tomorrow, then I will bring the headmaster out and let him have a look. That’s bloody disgusting. The kids don’t wipe their boots before they come in, do they?”

“Well, I don’t suppose they do.”

“You’ve got an unmade schoolyard, there’s no asphalt or concrete or anything. It’s up to you. Either you cooperate with me or I’ll see the Head and you can do it yourself.”

Bob Murray was another teacher there. He was the fullback to St Kilda. He was a teacher there and he was a good bloke, Bob.

How’d you get on with the teachers and the students?

Pretty good. I went and saw the headmaster after I spoke with this other fellow, and told him if I can’t get cooperation from the teachers and the kids to pick up their rulers and pens and keep the paper off the floor, it’s bad enough clearing the mud out. I said I’d write a letter to the education department. He said there’s no need to do that, that he’d have a talk with them. Which he did. From then on it was a bit better.

Over the Christmas period we had to do the venetian blinds and dust everything down. It was a shocking, dirty school.

Well, it was just bare boards and then mud and dust. It was pretty grotty from that perspective. It was quite a big job for you to clean the whole school on your own. If I hadn’t been there I suppose you would have had to employ someone else to give you a hand with it.

Well, either that or your mother would have had to come up. She came up a few times. She was a backstop. She was fantastic; she really was.

There was a little milk bar over the road from the school that the Ajayoglous had. Do you remember in summertime you would sometimes go out and get an ice cream and bring it back? We’d stop work long

enough to suck an icy pole. Mr Ajayoglu, who owned that milk bar later became a science teacher at St Albans High School and was my teacher in form 3 or form 4 Science. His children also were students at the High School and one of them, Bela,[1] was in my year group. I think they went on to University High School for their last year or two of High School.

I went up to Self and Goddards one hot night, and Alf Goddard was there, and they used to make their own ice blocks. I walked in the door and he said 'Hello Fred, what can I do you for?' I asked for a dozen ice blocks. 'A dozen? That's all I freeze at a time. You'll clean me out.' (laughs)

'What do you want to do? Sell them all in one hit, or feed them out to somebody one by one? And then you still might be left with a couple.'

He said 'Orright. But why do you want a dozen for?'

'There's four kids, the mother, and I. That's only two ice blocks each.'

'Most people are satisfied with one.'

'You can give me two shillings of mixed lollies.' So he grabbed a handful from four different containers and gave me that. I got on well with Alf. They were a good crowd.

Did you have any contact with the Stevens, because they had a hardware store in the area and I worked there for a few years on Saturday mornings.

The only contact I had with them was when I went in there to buy something. Of course, we bought a lot of stuff from there. Then shops started going up in Alfrieda Street. There was the bike shop run by Eric Alan. I would call in there on occasion and we'd have a beer with lumps of Polish sausage. He had a pretty wife.

I recollect that when you were working at Smorgons you used to come home on Thursday night or Friday night, whenever payday was, and you'd often bring a bag of lollies with you.

Always Saturday night I went up the street and got icy poles and lollies. If

[1] Subsequently trained in obstetrics and gynaecology.

we weren't going out I'd go and get the Herald and the Globe.[1] I'd get the papers at Martellos and I'd get some icy poles or "cream betweens" – Mum used to like them. Friday night was fish and chip night. I'd get fish and chips every Friday night … I think I had to go Sunshine for them.

Fish and chips! Did you bring them on the train or in the car?

On the train at first, then on the bike later on, and then we graduated to the car. I'm sure we didn't have a fish and chip shop in St Albans at the time.

There were quite a few technological developments during that time. You had a copper when you first moved into the house, and a chemical toilet. They changed through time.

We got a fridge after a while!

That must have been an exciting event, the first refrigerator.

I can still see your mother's face … she used to polish it and move it and sweep underneath it. And if the kids came running with something it was: *"Mind the fridge! Take those sticks out!"* Because Tony was sticks mad. He had a heap of sticks under the bungalow.

That was a big change from the iceman coming, and the paper being put down on the floor so he could chip the ice and put it in the ice box.

And you kids used to race out to the ice cart when he opened it and get bits of broken of ice.

With the developments all the technical and technological stuff in the house, what happened to the copper and the mechanical wringer?

Afterwards, we got a washing machine. I had to do the first three or four loads as your mother was frightened of it. She'd lift the top up and it would stop: "Fred! Something's gone wrong!" So I'd go and ask what's the matter. "I lifted the top and it stopped." "So, don't lift the top." "Well, I don't know. You'd better do the washing. Put in the clothes and start it up, and I'll take it out." The machine stopped washing and so she lifted the lid up and the machine was full of water. "Fred! It's full of water!" She got used to it after a while.

[1] The Sporting Globe, a sports newspaper.

Then you got the telephone. That must have been an exciting time.

Yes, that was an exciting time. We didn't have anybody's number to ring.

Nobody else had a phone I suppose.

Well, none of her family, anyway.

What made you get a phone?

I don't know. I think everyone else was getting one so it was the thing to do.

And then television came along.

Yes, that was in 1956. I remember that because it was the Olympic Games. I remember we would stand outside the windows of the electrical shops and watch the TV through the window until we got our own.

What happened in the home once the TV arrived?

Well, Tony wouldn't eat his vegetables. When we got the TV, he ate anything that was put in front of him: Brussels sprouts, cabbage, carrots; the lot. He was more interested in the television than what was going in his mouth. And you know those shows that were on in those days are still being shown now on Fox.

Do you remember some of the programs you used to watch?

There was Disney's Mickey Mouse Club, Gilligan's Island, Graham Kennedy's In Melbourne Tonight – never missed Graham – there was McHale's Navy, and there was another one about POWs and the Germans … Hogan's Heroes. There was kids coming watching TV when we first got it, until they got their own. Archie used to come to the football with us. It would be the Jones's Archie who used to come to the football with us. Did you have a broken leg at the time? What was his name … Archie …his boy got killed in a motorbike accident over in Tasmania. Archie was his first name. It will come to me.

There was a pop show on Saturday night. Before the television, did you listen to the radio on a regular basis? I remember D 24 and the Calder Police Report. I don't know whether you used to listen to any of those.

Yes, there were plays on the radio but I've forgotten what we listened to. The radio's too far back. I was more interested in sport than anything else. I used to listen to the football and listen to the cricket - sit up to three and four o'clock in the morning listening to the cricket when it was over in England.

And family holidays became quite an institution as well, in summertime, going away camping. I guess they're the sort of things we wouldn't have been able to do if you hadn't been working so hard. We wouldn't have had a car, we wouldn't have been able to afford the camping equipment, and we wouldn't have been able to afford the caravan later.

Well there's the other thing. I used to take everybody down there, take the caravan down, and I'd come back to work and go down again on the week-end if I had the weekend off.

What was the situation like in relation to growing vegetables and chooks and that sort of thing, because you mention immigrants who came to St Albans had their vegetable gardens in their front yards?

We never grew any vegetables. I put vegetable gardens in and your mother didn't like them. She said they looked like graves. So I pulled it down and put the garage up. We put the bungalow at the back. Matter of fact, I think the bungalow went up first, before the garage.

And that became my room, because the three boys were all sharing the one bedroom and Glenda had a room of her own. As the boys started to get older and I was needing time to study you built a bungalow at the back.

And bunks for the boys in their bedroom. I remember the bunks, I made them so perfect, I made sure everything was dead correct, and then when they were finished I put the mattress in and it fit perfect, but I hadn't left enough room to tuck in the blankets. (laughs)

And the chooks were quite an institution in the family over many years.

Yes, we had them mainly for Christmas, and we wanted the eggs, of course.

Do you have any special memories of St Albans and the time you were there, any special feelings about it?

Not really. It was just life. That was my job. It was up to me to pay the bills

and keep you kids dressed. You kids were always dressed decently, with nice clothes to go out in. Your mother always saw to that. Matter of fact she went to buy herself a dress one day and came back with a couple of shirts and hats for you boys, so I asked 'Where's your dress?'

'The boys need these. I'll get the dress another time.' She worked every opportunity she got. She worked at Selfs, she worked at Martellos, she worked at the dairy, she worked doing housework for a family near the water tower and sometimes she did housework for Mrs Errington.

Your mother also worked at the Tin Shed on Errington Reserve for a while. They had a crèche and she did like that work, looking after the kids. I think she worked there two or three days a week, but it wasn't for long. It was from there that she went to the dairy.

That was one thing about working, we got the money to do things. We helped pay for your trip with Doc, we helped with Steven's trip. We got everything we wanted for the house in the way of furniture and carpet and that sort of thing. I don't know how many times we painted it out. And then the chimney started to come away from the house – left a space about that wide. I got a lump of three by two and nailed it on both sides and painted that. But it was starting to move again when we left.

[Note: The family moved from St Albans to Seaford in 1964 when Fred and Gwladys purchased a milk bar in Seaford on the Mornington Peninsular. At that time, their eldest son, Jeff, had finished his secondary school education at St Albans High School and had gone to Monash University. The second child, Glenda, and the two youngest children, Steven, then 14 years old, and Tony, then 10 years old, moved to Seaford with their parents. After a couple of years in the milk bar Fred and Gwladys had a fifth child, Paul, and they then sold the business. That was when Fred was employed by James Richardson & Co.]

So you were in St Albans from 1949 to 1964. What led you to leave and buy a milk bar?

Nellie and Con had a milk bar.[1] They were doing well in theirs and your

[1] Gwladys's sister, Nellie, and her husband, Con Damaskinos, lived in St Albans in Lyall Street for a while. Con was a Greek Cypriot. He died in 2008 on the Gold Coast, where he had lived for many years.

mother also wanted a milk bar, but she wanted a good dwelling with it and there was no such thing. Those milk bars were broken down and needed building up, but you had to put up with this sort of slum dwelling at the back; some of them were quite shocking, I must admit. This one in Seaford had a nice dwelling at the back with two bedrooms and we had the caravan that we put out the back for Steven and Tony. There were two bedrooms: one for us and one for Glenda, but that was before she joined the army.

We had that milk bar for a couple of years but were not successful and then I got the job as a salesman at Richardson's. I was there for 17 years, from the time I was 44 or 45, and that was good money.[1]

When I went to work at Richardsons there was a lot of paperwork there. After the salesmen had made the sales they'd come back to Richardsons to balance their books and hand in the duplicate copy.

I was good with figures, and that's why my mate made me the office manager. I was the best figure man, you might as well say, and Ken asked me would I mind taking over the office because he was having a lot of trouble getting his invoices out. Then the business was taken over in 1983 and I was retrenched at the age of 63.

Perhaps we'll end it there as it's a very tiring process for you. Shall we end the interview there?

I think so. I've just about run out of oomph.

Thanks so much for recollecting your memories.

Interview and recording by Jeff Barlow, December 2005.

[Fred Barlow died of pancreatic cancer at Frankston on 30 August 2008 at the age of 87 with his family around him.]

[1] Fred had always worked at relatively unskilled or semi-skilled labouring work. When he worked for James Richardson & Co, he moved from delivery and sales work into managing the office and office staff, which was his first clerical and management position. The 'good money' was an additional gain.

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