

The date is 16th September, 1982, and this is MR. ALEX GRAY, Estate Agent, of High Street, Thornbury.

Had a farm bounded by Hutton Street, Miller Street, St. Georges Road and the Merri Creek.

Who had that farm?

My grandparents on my mother's side, and that's why I think we came back to live in Hutton Street. My father started the T. and G. in New Zealand before I was born, and I'm 75, and I think my mother must have got home sick. I never found out. I heard she was sick and they came home and one of my sisters was born in New Zealand. They came back and they bought a home in Hutton Street, Thornbury - 6 Hutton Street, Thornbury - this would be about I think 1904, a house with two blocks of land alongside it. 210 pounds. He didn't have enough money, from what I can gather, and the agent said, "My commission's ten pounds, I'll lend you that and I'll get you a building society loan". It's all comparative.

There was a wine saloon where the State Savings Bank, Thornbury North, is now. You will see a terrace of shops there, at the corner of Pender Street. You know Thornbury? Well, you go to the corner of Pender Street. My mother always tells me the story of my grandfather wanting to get into speculation in 1890, that is when the boom was on. They used to go to the Yann Street Methodist Church.

Which street?

That her mother said to her father,

Yann Street. Y-A-N-N Street. The church up before you get to Bell Street, Preston, and I remember my mother said, "Now I wouldn't do anything, Tom, I wouldn't do anything, you know things will burst". He came home one day and said, "Mother, we've done it", and they ^{then} bought two shops in this terrace, and he bought it in partnership with the Minister of the Yann Street Methodist Church and three months later, you know what happened? The crash came. It gave my grandfather a stroke and he died and they ostracised the Minister of the church because he owed so much money.

Tell me a bit about the wine saloon that you know about.

Lanterry's

Well, all I know about it was Lanterry's Wine Saloon, and a wine saloon in those days was a dreadful thing, from what I can gather. The wineos would go in and, from what I can gather, would buy a glass of wine for a penny, tuppence or something, and half of them would sit there most of the afternoon getting boozed. You have read about wine saloons.

The Thornbury school, now I'll go back. The Thornbury School opened in 1915, before that I used to walk firstly from Hutton Street to South Preston State School, which was a fair walk, up near PANCH hospital, and then Wales Street re-opened. We used to go to Wales Street, it was a hell of a walk. This was when I was 4½ to 5. Then in 1915, when I was 9, the Thornbury School opened, and my father was Chairman of the School Committee. A man named Rodgerson was the Treasurer. His sons are still alive. But he was a very meticulous man. My father always used to tell us the story of how they had a school bazaar, and when they added up the total, they were out a few pence. Mr. Rodgerson, who was very meticulous, was scurrying around looking for the pennies, and in the end they found them. After an hour or two they found another two or three quid. *found*

At the back of the Croxton Park Hotel was a football ground and that is now Johnson Street and Stott Street. Stott the agent, and Johnson was a baker then and became our partner - Gray and Johnson. They bought it and subdivided it and one became Johnson Street and the other became Stott Street.

*, About what year would the football ground be there?

When I was at the Thornbury State School, it would be 1915, between 1915 and about 1920. Previous to that, or about the same time, there was the race course. You know of the race course? - *called Sydney race course*

At Georges Road called the
Oh yes, we've got a bit on the race course.

about 1950 into
That was subdivided *and* Bird Avenue and Bradley Avenue. Well, Bird was the Councillor of Northcote, *I was in Council with him,* he was one of the local Councillors in his Ward, and Bradley was the Engineer. That is how the names of Bird and Bradley were got. *That which was originally my grandparents' farm became Fyffe Street and Keon Street - Fyffe Street being the first street north of Hutton Street running west, that was after Fyffe the solicitor. Then there is Rennie Street, I don't know who that was named after. That would be one of the syndicate, I should think, who bought it. Keon, his name was Keon Cohen. He later became a member of the Legislative Council, and he was in the syndicate.*

Now tell me, what sort of a farm was it?

Milk farm.

They had cows?

Cows, yes. At the end of Hutton Street, if you go to Hutton Street and look right up to the other end, you will see a big house looking down Hutton Street, and that belonged to McNamara, who eventually took the milk farm over. Now, I can't say whether my grandparents owned it or rented. I don't know, I would say that they must have owned it. They lived in a house that eventually was at the corner of Keon Street and Comas Grove, and to the modern way looked back. Of course, it looked over the creek. It must have been a magnificent view down the valley and over the Chinese gardens. Mr. McNamara, I can always see him coming along in those days in his horse and cart to Plow Street. We were at the corner of Hutton Street and Plow Street. Of an afternoon, D. Mac, you know the milk carts and the little round things where they put their names, D. Mac. Well, his son later on, he was a member of the VRC - Harold McNamara - a very successful breeder of race horses. He firstly went to Reservoir and then his father bought him a farm down at Werribee, you know for 50 quid an acre. The war came on later, and after the war, a lot of his river flats, you know the new Australians coming out wanted river flats. Where he paid 50 pound an acre, he got 1,000 pounds an acre. A multi-millionaire now.

Well then, the Chinese gardens were down at the end of Hutton Street/Miller Street, right along the creek. Did you know that? Where Anderson Road is now.

No, I haven't got any detail about those Chinese gardens.

as hardland

about 1918-1922

Well, there were Chinese gardens. My father was on Council and he wanted the Council to buy the Chinese gardens before they got built on, for parkland. Now if they had done that, they could've had Miller Street, you know Miller Street, that's Dundas Street. They could've had from Miller Street now to the present Golf Course. Now they've got the Golf Course down south. ~~Instead of being industrial, now a lot of that is industrial and there is a big factory down and the owners of homes around there they've spent hundreds of pounds suing the company, Containers. Well the smell used to be - well, you can still smell it but not as bad. That would have been lovely right through there, like they're hoping to do with Heidelberg.~~ *the continuation*
along the gamma run

But I can remember electric light coming to Northcote, and my father and a man named Lees, another estate agent, were on the Council and they had a fight with the conservative ones in those days to convert to electric light, which came in about 1920/1921. Then the Catholic church came, I remember the Catholic church coming at the corner of Rossmoyne Street, Mansfield Street and High Street, where it is now, ~~we're~~ *my wife* opposite on the other corner of Mansfield Street. There is a personal thing my father and mother used to get very annoyed, being strong Methodists, at about half past nine or ten o'clock of a Sunday morning in Fellows' drags, ~~now~~ *at* (Fellows was an ancestor of Gould's.) ~~Now do you know what a drag is? A horse drag?~~ *comic consequence* My parents would be saying, "Those Catholics there getting mass out of the way and going on picnics". But the funny thing is that the Methodists ~~had~~ *now have* their picnics on Sunday.

About the school? *Miss Howard*

My memory of school was nine o'clock until four o'clock. I think we went home at quarter past twelve for lunch, I think, until half past one. Then we went right through. We had play time in the morning, but I don't think we had play time in the afternoon. You may remember, though, you're younger than me. I ~~think we had play time in the morning.~~ I can always remember knocking off at four o'clock because there used to be a train that went at five past four from the Thornbury Railway Station. Two friends of mine, a ~~funny thing I rang one of my old school friends' sons, because he had just died, named Jackson. This fella Jackson,~~ I can't think of the other one's name, ~~he~~ *they* used to sell "Heralds" at Flinders Street. They had to get the five past four train and they were let out of school at five to four, and they would race in to get the five past four into town. So it was nine until four and we never had as long a holiday as we do now. Eventually we got up to six weeks holiday. I don't know how long it is now.

What about discipline? What was discipline like?

Discipline was strong.

How were you disciplined?

Strap and kept in. Mr. Hughes, a lovely old fellow really, he was the first Headmaster, and later on he did the Anglican course and became a Minister and got into Council, too. I can see him now, as he came in with the strap - teachers used to ~~but~~ *strap* if they wanted, they used to get old Hughes to do it too, the Headmaster. He would give you six of the best on the hands.

Did you find that any of the teachers were rather sadistic with their methods of strapping?

The only thing I can remember about sadistic teachers was my elder sister who was left handed, and she had a terrible time. They would wack her to go right. ~~The man is still alive.~~ The last time I went to Scots Church a man named Smith was there, he's on the door ~~but he shouldn't be~~ - he must be about ninety - and he was the only one who took pity on my sister being a left hander. I don't think they meant to be sadistic, but that was the rule evidently. You weren't allowed to be left handed. My sister became ambidextrous.

Handed

Do you think there was much difference about how much children had to spend at school in those days, and taking their lunch, shops and all that sort of thing?

Yes, there was a great difference, because I remember we ~~used to~~, when I was a kid, I would sometimes be given money, but we used to take our lunch. ~~They would very rarely do it at night, because we never had fridges.~~ Mum would be up and she'd cut the three lunches and away we'd go. I can't even remember having play lunch.

early in the morning

Did you every buy your lunch? Once a week or anything?

Occasionally, but not when I lived in Hutton Street, because I had only 200 yards to go home. Yes, I can remember when we ^{went to} South Preston, occasionally we got threepence, and I remember I used to buy a big yeast loaf. I can't think if it was buttered or not. But we never had the money like people have now. I can remember in the very early days we used to get a penny of a Saturday morning and go up to the lolly shop. Later we got threepence.

Talk about discipline. I rang a bell for an auction, I remember ^{the first time} I must have been about ~~twelve~~, for my father ~~and he~~ gave me a shilling and said, "Now open up a State Savings Bank account". But that was what happened in those days. Nowadays

New

How did people obtain money to buy?

Building societies and banks just the same. I started with my Day when I was nineteen, I worked in the railways first. I worked at the railway station at Thornbury. In those days before that we used to play footy in the station paddock, you know, end to end footy. Then in 1925, there was a bit of a boom on then, after ^{the first} the war, there were building society loans, they were the main thing, and of course the State Bank had the usual ~~private~~ mortgages. Then the Depression came.

the first

Talk about shops though, I remember Thornbury Theatre and that big block of shops with it being built, and then just south of that a Mr. Langfield bought a block of land off my father for 200 pounds for a shop site and my father always wanted to buy next door but he didn't, much to his regret. ^{him} Of course, there was a hay and corn store there and that got pulled down, it used to go right to Hutton Street, and a service station, which is still there. There was always the terrace of houses, and then the terminus took over because the a lot of people travelled by tram and that was really the terminus before ^{came in} electric tram ^{came in} or buses, into High Street or trams into Plenty Road. The banks and shops came ^{backwards} backwards to that terrace I was talking about, and on the other side came ^{down} back to where the theatre is. ^{now}

Backwards

Friday night was a wonderful night. We used to be ^{open} up then, of course, until nine o'clock. I know ~~my wife~~ ^{my wife} who came from Collins Street, Thornbury, that was a great night for her mother and auntie - a shopping night - they would go down High Street. You can't remember late shopping, can you? But late shopping was a great night for people.

I used to do late shopping in Smith Street, Collingwood.

Well, Smith Street was a favourite one for my mother. ^{the big store was Jay's Gibsons where my mother would buy} Gibson's, "I want a suit for my little boy", and I remember saying to her one day, "Don't call me a little boy!". We used to get on the tram, ^{to the city & change to the city} and later on the tram went right through there. ^{from Thornbury to the city}

What about renting houses? There would be a lot of difference these days. Did you have families in your home always?

I remember I ^{used} ~~used to be~~ a valuer for a building society in the 30's and 40's, and the manager used to go out ^{her} and he was in the land boom. He showed me three houses ^{the security} had in Plow Street, Thornbury, they paid the tenants five shillings a week to stop in. In the land boom days in the 1890's. In the Depression here, they would come along and the great thing they used to pick in those days was a lot of the toilets and laundries were on the right of way, of course, they used to empty the pan from the lane. So you would have your laundries, and a lot of them were rough, with not many regulations, and the waste would sometimes go outside the fence and come back. A number of times we used to get the lead ^{to be carried} stuff. One day a builder came to me and he said, "What do you think of Victoria Road". Victoria Road, of course, the flats we called it, east of Victoria Road, we played footy down there, and there was hardly a house, and no drainage, and he built a house, much to his disgust, just around the Depression time just as it was coming in in 1929 and 1930, stole the bar from the base.

Now tell me, where was the lead?

The lead is the flashing round the pipes and you can bend it and then they solder it round corners.

It's not used now, I don't think, is it?

No, they've got the plastic. In our day, of course, the sewer pipe was about ~~that long~~ in vitreous clay, they called it. ^{Westerlands was a pottery then} Westerlands were pottery, they were the boys who made it. I remember when the Glen Iris Brick Company came in down here in Clarke Street and James Street, there are some lovely homes in Clarke Street, did you know the aristocracy of Northcote were going to live there. Then the brick hills came, and away they went. ^{There are some lovely homes in Clarke St, Northcote because the aristocracy of Melbourne lived there & in James St}

The what?

^{return} The brick hills and clay holes and away ^{came} the society went. ^{the} You see, Glen Iris, ^{Burn to} they were going to build at Glen Iris, and they got pushed out by the up and coming out at Glen Iris, so they came out to Northcote and built the clay hole and then there's a street Tobin Avenue off Clarke Street. Now that was Sir Edmund Hilary's wife.

^{that was the finish of the 'topps'}

^{Tobin Ave off Clarke St is named after the family of the wife of Sir Edmund Hillary}

What about the vandalism? Was it worse?

Vandalism was dreadful because there were that many empty houses. Now we had what they call a good rent roll. After the Depression, I would say it was cut down to a quarter. People got sick of having their houses vandalised and they sold them, and they were so cheap. I will never forget a place in Croxton, single-fronted weatherboard on about twenty-five feet (still there) and I was at an auction a couple of years ago and I said to my son, that is one of the cheapest houses I ever sold. ^{He} They said, "How much?". I said, "Three hundred". They said, "Why?". I said, "We had a bad tenant, a ~~tough~~ ^{rough} time, and the tenant went out and then one of our very ^{brave} game investors came along and said, "I'll give you three hundred pounds for that", and I said "Don't be silly, Arthur, not three hundred!". "I won't give any more". So I went round to the owner who lived in Johnson Street, Croxton, and I said "Mrs. So and So, I've got an offer of three hundred pounds, and its a dreadful offer". She said, "How much is your commission". I said, "Twelve pounds ten". She says, "Get me three hundred and twelve pounds and we'll sell it". That is how vandalism was.

She was renting it was she?

She had it let.

It was vandalised so badly.?

In a way I can't ^{blame} ~~blame~~ the vandals of those days because they were pinching things to get some money. For instance, I was playing football for Northcote, and every Monday I used to ride my bike to collect rents, and the unemployed used to be on the streets. Dozens of them. In those days, on what we call susso, they got a free ticket to our footy.

So I knew a lot of them, and they always wanted to talk to me, which helped me later on because I got a message from an agent at Westgarth one day "The unemployed are on the rampage. They're going into all the agents shops and they're going to do a bit of vandalism." Because we agents were the mugs for the owners. If someone got evicted they didn't always think of the owner, they thought of the agent. We had to do the work - serve the notice and get the police. So I thought, I,m not going to stop here, and I got in my little motor car and I was going down High Street and they were all marching up and they said, "You're the next, Sandy, you're the next", and I was the only agent they never went into because of my football connections.

But things were so bad, I ^{collected the rent from} ~~had~~ a house in Carlisle Street, which had a bad tenant, and ^{people} ~~people~~ thing ~~we're~~ ^{we were} dreadful to evict, but the owners have got to the stage where they've got a mortgage on it, so they've got to get rent or get something, otherwise they lose the house. I'll never forget, things were dreadful. Right in the midst of the Depression and we got an eviction order for a house in Carlisle Street, Preston, which is really Thornbury, north of Dundas Street, and things were so bad then with the unemployed, and I suppose now you would call it the unemployed union, I don't ~~know~~, the polic picketed it for a quarter of a mile radius and wouldn't let anyone come in while they put the furniture outside. Dreadful, you know. The poorer people, even now, will always look upon ^{upper class} ~~the owners as~~ class and all owners are wealthy.

Tell me, they're having a little trouble these days with squatters in empty flats. Was there anything like that in those days?

In our day we found the further out the houses went, the more empty ones we had. A lot of them came in and lived with Mum. So that's what happened to those people, they went home to mum.

When they couldn't afford to rent?

Yes, in those days it was a different thing. The parents automatically took them in. Now, you hear some kids say that their parents abuse them because they're out of work. I don't really believe it.

There's a lot of youth sleeping out in the open these days.

That's right. But then I would like to get the other side of the story. Who's fault is it that they're sleeping out? They don't want to go home, possibly. Of course, mum and dad might be hard-up, but no I can't remember squatting in our day.

Gee, there were a lot of houses. A lot of houses were sold, and a lot also were sold to investors, like Toolangi. A lot of them would be investors, because inflation started to roar. In 1921, a double-fronted weatherboard - 350 - in 1928 - 850. So a lot of people bought, and a lot of people, like they have done over the last thirty years, got into investment. They realised it was no good having money because if you had twenty thousand pounds in the bank in 1950, and you had it now, what would it buy? So, they were adopting the same thing. That is why a lot of houses had tenants, because there were a lot of investments after the first war, people made a lot of money. They talk about inflation now, we had it then unfortunately. I hope we never have as big a recession as we had then. It was a Depression. When the Depression started to lift, was when the papers started to talk about how bad the Depression was, and you know why, because they lost a lot of money in advertising. They nearly cut their own throats to pay for it. We all get down and that's what the papers want, everyone wants to start, things are going to be good because everyone's preaching doom and gloom, aren't they?

How did you entertain yourselves?

Church, cricket, football, socials. Socials at the church. All sorts of parlour games.

You would be fairly young playing those games, wouldn't you? How old?

What are you talking about? Now?

Well, I was wondering when you were a teenager, that sort of thing.

A teenager, well I was, ¹⁹²⁰⁻¹⁹²⁵ 1925. The church.

Dances?

Our church didn't have dances, but we went to Bell's Hall, on the corner of Normanby Avenue and the Thornbury Bowling Club, the railway. That was Bell's Hall. Mrs. Bell was related to Gould's. Then Strettons' had the big hall down here, the dance hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Stretton used to teach dancing at Bell's Hall at we used to go dancing there, and later on we got to the stage to go to the Palais of St. Kilda, and the Glaciorium for skating. Then, later if you went with your girlfriend, you really had a night out, you went to the State Theatre. You know that.