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I suppose the best way to start this is to start at the beginning, and the beginning is that my great grandfather was brought out from Oxfordshire in 1842 by Ben Boyd, the whaling celebrity. He was brought out under contract to work at the whaling station at Boydtown. It was a 12 months contract - all found - passage out and, what he had to do, he was a farmer in Oxfordshire and his job was to provide food for the other people that were working in the whaling settlement.

After the 12 months was up incidentally, his wife and five children came with him and my grandfather was the eldest of the five children and he was eight years old when they arrived in this country.

They finally left Boydtown and made their way over land by dray and arrived in Melbourne some time in November, I understand, November, 1843. They settled out at Lower Plenty where my great grandfather farmed and my grandfather, when he got a bit older of course, took up land and farmed in what is now the 9th hole of the Heidelberg Golf Course at the junction of the Plenty and the Yarra Rivers. But, unfortunately, he was on the lower side of the land and every time it really flooded he got flushed out and, ultimately, it forced him to leave the area. With the last flood, Alan Marshall and his ~~Poets and Peasants~~ I think it is the book he's written on the Eltham area, mentions him in the book as having lost a crop of potatoes worth about four thousand pound which, in those days, was a considerable sum of money.

So, my father was the last one born at Lower Plenty - they had nine children all told, and dad was the last one born at Lower Plenty. They left Lower Plenty and came along back to Heidelberg where he worked around the place for a while my great grandfather was still out there. And finally arrived in Northcote where, we understand, he had a partnership with the bacon curer "Smith" in building. Now it may sound strange that a farmer was a builder but evidently they had to be everything in those days and I presume that Smith supplied the money and my grandfather did the work, whatever it was that had to be done, but I understand they put a lot of fencing around Northcote and they lived in Jenkins Street.

After they arrived here in Northcote they added to the family another two or three girls and that was it. My grandfather died in 1901.

Well, to get down to my recollections of early Northcote : I was born in Gladstone Avenue, at home, and when I was about 12 months old my father built the house in Christmas Street and we moved there. So really, my recollections of Northcote start at Christmas Street. If you can imagine Christmas Street in those days, and I'm talking about 1903 or 1904, there were scattered houses down as far as Victoria Road. I vividly remember the open paddocks on the opposite side of Christmas Street to us with a big open drain along the front of them. When you got down past Victoria Road - 'cause it was all paddocks right down to the Darebin Creek.

Progress in Farming

I went to school at Wales Street and I must have been a bit of a villain because mother was always chasing me up because I'd never come home from school. I wouldn't come home for my lunch and I'd go walkabout and so forth. But, I can well remember the big Gallery in the school where we sat with our knees up - the teacher was a way down in the hollow, but the names of teachers, of course, have escaped me. I can't remember the names of any of the teachers. But people living around the area were Brace's. They had a nursery on the corner of Christmas Street and Wales Street. Next door to us in Christmas Street was Darlings - they were retired school teachers and the grandparents of Cyril Darling, who was Preston identity - he died recently in his 90's - Pizzey's, the Tannery people - they lived on the corner of Wales Street and Darebin Road. The house is still there but it's now surrounded by a lot of residents, including a Nursing Home which is built on part of the property.

But they had an orchard and going to school, of course, it was a great temptation when the fruit was in season to take a few plums or quinces or whatever they had growing over the fence.

Other people - Tresgothics - the boot manufacturers, they lived in Christmas Street. Ivor Tresgothic, who was the Manager of Julius Marlow down here, or Managing Director, he was about my age and when we went to school I suppose you could say we were playmates, in those days.

Another character there was ^{O'Keefe} ~~Bow-Keeps~~ who had a Dairy in Christmas Street. They delivered milk but they didn't milk cows. They had their milk brought to them and you could go to the Dairy, of course, and get your billy can filled up.

Around the corner in St. David Street was Blackman's and old Mr. Blackman was a fishmonger and he had a barrow which he used to push down to Clifton Hill and park on the side of the road at the tram stop, or the tram terminus as it was in those days, and sell his fish or whatever he had in season there, and push the barrow way up the hill and home again. And, I can remember my parents taking me and the only sister that I had at that time, down to a function at Clifton Hill and missing the last tram, which wasn't hard to do in those days - missing the last tram and catching up with the fishmonger and him putting the children on his fish barrow and pushing them up the hill, and that's how we got home.

I went to Sunday School at the Prince of Wales Park Methodist Church. That was in St. David Street, and probably on the site of the Church of England that that lady spoke about, because that's the only place that I can remember that there was ever a Church on it.

My father was a grocer and he left the grocery trade and went to the brickworks, because there was more money offering and, during one of his unemployment spells, and they were pretty frequent in those days, he got work at the Oakleigh brickworks and he moved out to Oakleigh. So, all the years that I've been around, 12 years of that time was spent outside of Northcote, well not quite 12 years because when we eventually returned we came to Alphington. My mother's mother lived in Yarra Street, as it was known then, and mum wanted to be near her so they bought a house in Yarra Street next door to the old hall. Grandma was on one side of the hall and we were on the other side. That would be about, we left Northcote in about 1912/13, that's right we came back to Alphington about 1920. We lived there for a few years. My younger sister was an original pupil at the Alphington School. She was in the first intake of pupils there. The school, of course, was in the old Alphington Hall - the one that's called Wainsford Hall - yes, well of course it's gone now.

Even in that time, it was mostly paddocks up around this way. If you went to Ivanhoe you went across the old footbridge down there and you were walking across paddocks.

In 1923 they went back to Northcote to live and that's really where I started to become aware of things around me. It's where I started to question my father about his early recollections of Northcote and some of antics that they got up to in those days, and possibly it's well worth recording that they used to jump horses over what are now the railway gates in Arthurton Road - that's he and his brothers used to do that. They used to, 'cause High Street, of course, was very deep drains and the local cab company, they used to run horse cabs or horse buses down to Clifton Hill and back and they kept a lot of horses, somewhere up High Street, and anybody that wanted a cheap horse could go there in the foaling season and get a foal for nothing. Well my father has recounted many a time people have wheeled these foals home in wheelbarrows and before they've got them home the foal has been dead, because it's been tipped out of the barrow.

High Street, as I remember it in my childhood days, Fellows livery stables, coachworks, horse sales and what have you, just up from the corner of Dennis Street where Gould's Motors are now - Gould's own part of the property - and Gould's are related to Fellows, I think he's a grandson of Fellows. Fellows were members of an Israelitic Order, the only one in Australia, and they were the only followers of it, and I can remember old Mr. Fellows, his hair was down past his shoulders - talk about the modern day youth - his hair was down past his shoulders and he had a very heavy bushy beard. His sons all had long curls down their back, they never cut their hair, they never shaved and they didn't do any business between 6 p.m on Friday and 6 p.m on Saturday, that was their Sabbath, and even down to recent times when a Mrs. Wright who was a Fellows, who was a Miss Fellows, she had a Reception Room in the old Fellows home, next door to their coachworks and she wouldn't do any business after 6 o'clock on Friday and 6 o'clock on Saturday. She always used to stipulate that to anybody, that we don't answer the phone during those hours.

Fellows had horse drags - they used to hire them out, with a driver of course, and I remember my father was in the ~~Protestant~~ ^{Protestant} ~~Lions~~ ^{Lions} Friendly Society and they used to do a lot of visiting around the districts - Coburg, Heidelberg and wherever there was a Sister Lodge, there'd be a social gathering and the Northcote Lodge would hire one of those drags and away we'd go. Of course, it took about two hours to get to where you were going, but I suppose that's just part of the night out. That's one of my vivid recollections during my early childhood - or childhood in Northcote.

Then there was Mark Sharp. He had a boot repairing business up on the corner where Sharp's motor/spare parts business is now - it's got a garage at the back, well that was his son Harry Sharp that converted the whole thing into a motor spare parts business. Well, we used to visit the Sharps very frequently. Mark Sharp and my father were great pals, so we had something in common there you know, mum was always popping in because Christmas Street wasn't very far away from High Street, though it appeared to be a long way as far as I was concerned.

STURDY

And you come further up the hill and there was a doctor there, and I've never heard anybody mention - Dr. Sturdy. Dr. Sturdy was a brother of Admiral Sturdy who was the victor of Jutlin in the First World War. The doctor was a member of the Victorian Mounted Rifles, although I don't think he went to the Boar War, I'm not certain about that, but I don't think he did. He set up practice in Northcote and he built a very substantial home and surgery in High Street on the corner of James Street and High Street. Well the last doctor there, Dr. MacDonald, sold the building and it's now a block of flats. But the interesting point in the story, I suppose, as far as I'm concerned, was that I was the first patient when he opened the building. I was only a baby. Mother took me along to Dr. Sturdy. He was an interesting character, Dr. Sturdy, he was a north of Ireland man, came from Belfast. My mother's father was a north of Ireland man, he came from Belfast. Of course, they had a bit in common coming from the same place. He was a very staunch Methodist, as was my grandfather, as was a lot of people who came from that part of Ireland, Wesleen I suppose I should be calling it.

Then you come down the hill and the cobblestones in the roadway to save their horses from slipping when they were taking the lorry loads and dray loads of bricks down the hill from the brickworks.

When you come to the depression years, it seems to stand out, and I think everybody has acknowledged this, that Northcote was a very close-knit community. Everybody was out to help each other, and there were a lot of unemployed people in Northcote at that time, in the 1930's.

I can well remember Smiths the butchers, who gave away tons of meat to unemployed people. Most of the grocers along High Street would stand two people who were up against it for meals or for food. The Council made available the Wimble Street Hall to, well the Council made available to the unemployed in Northcote the Wimble Street Hall as a place where they could meet and keep themselves abreast of the times, have a social gathering, which they did pretty frequently. But, unfortunately, there were two groups of unemployed in Northcote - I suppose you could say one run by the left wingers in those days (Communist Party) and the one that I was interested in at the time was the one that mostly Labor people were connected with. Well they used to collect food parcels and get various people in the community to come along and give an address and generally help each other.

We'll leave out the bit about - well Wally Glandfield was a Councillor in Northcote and he represented the East Ward in the City of Northcote. He was opposed on several occasions but his opponents found it very hard to shift him because of his attitude to the people in the Ward, everybody loved him. He was very generous to anybody who was down and out or luck was against him, put it that way; he would assist them in all ways that he possibly could and to illustrate or highlight his generosity, a cousin of mine lived in one of his houses in Separation Street and he stipulated that while any of that particular family were alive and wished to live in the house, they were to do so, they were not to be moved and their rent was not to be more than a pound a week. So up until recent years, I suppose the last 20 years, the house was occupied by one of my cousin's family.

Wally was a man of no pretensions about him. When he was Mayor of Northcote in the early 1920's he'd think nothing of getting on the garbage truck and having a ride up (a garbage dray as they were in those days they were all horse-drawn vehicles) High Street on top of the load.

I well remember in his second term as Mayor. The feature of the Northcote Council in those days was the Mayoral Ball, and the Mayoral Return Ball where the citizens gave the Mayor a social function and made presentations to him and so forth for his year of Office. I was at that Mayoral Ball in his second term and he came into the supper room during supper, he and his wife, and he didn't make any floury speech he just said "well go on, eat up, fill your bellies up" that's the sort of man he was. Incidentally, he was a butcher, his business was in Separation Street, and one of his many activities was that he'd been left a herbalist business in Richmond and he became a herbalist. He continued in that business with one of his sons running the butchering business, until his death. I'm not sure when he died - the 1930's I think it was, or 1940's possibly, 1940's.

Regarding my working life, I shifted from job to job until I finally got myself ensconsed with A.P.M. in their Melbourne Mill, and people in this area will remember the Kells family. One of them still lives in ? Well, old Mr. Kells was the Manager of the Manager of the Melbourne Mill. He lived on the premises down here, there was a house in the grounds and he lived in that house, although he was a Manager at the Melbourne Mill and it was he who gave me a job down there at Melbourne, and I must have been doing something right because I finished up staying, I didn't drift any further. After a few years in Melbourne they were going to close the Mill down and I got a transfer to Fairfield. I was living in Northcote and they worked on Sundays, Saturdays and Sundays, and there was no public transport on a Sunday so, of course, I had to walk. And I said to my wife I've got to move nearer to the Mill, I can't be walking to work on a Sunday and then walking home. We lived in Clarke Street, Northcote, then. So that's how it was we came down here - now that's over 40 years ago - and we've been here ever since.

Regarding work, it is very different these days to what it was in those days. It's more highly technical now. The output from their machines is ten times as much as what we were doing in the 1940's. It took a lot of men to run the Mills. Today it doesn't take anywhere near that number to run the Mills and to produce more paper. The raw material has changed. It's mostly now eucalyptus wood pulp with a little bit of imported non-fibre wood pulp. When I was at the Mill it was mostly rags - not down here - but in Melbourne. It used to be rags, underfelt for floor coverings, jute bags, they used to cut them up and cook them. It was a good lesson in recycling. They talk about recycling waste paper these days well, of course, they used to be recycled rags. And I only read recently where there is a Mill in America still doing that. But, of course, their output is very low, they only do about 30 tons a week.

They got the rags from household collections. There used to be Rag Men going around collecting. They sold it to the Mills. Mostly linen and cotton stuff, there was no synthetics in those days. They used to get a lot of mill cuttings, like shirt manufacturers and factory ends, underclothing manufacturers and so forth. They didn't make newsprint from it, they made fine writing materials. Most of the newsprint was imported - the print itself was imported. It's only in recent years that they've manufactured newsprint in Tasmania and that is done with eucalyptus wood pulp and a sprinkling of softwoods. And the best way of knowing what is in the newsprint is that locally produced newsprint yellows very quickly and that's the eucalyptus wood pulp in it. You get the imported newsprint that remains white for a long time because it's all done with softwoods, pines and birch and spruce and all those sorts of things.

Well I was, you can say, 50 years with A.P.M. They must have been satisfied with me, I certainly was satisfied with them otherwise I wouldn't have stayed that long. But I think it was a very happy existence. The money was regular, the work wasn't too hard, there were times it was laborious but more often than not it was not too hard.

Regarding pollution in the river - it's certainly true that a lot of material, such as water, waste water, went back into the river and the ultimate result would be that it would kill the life in the river, the fish and so forth. Some time in the 1920's or 1930's, 1920's I think it was, the government imposed standards or restrictions on the amount of water that was to be put back into the river. Now A.P.M. were fined in the Kew Court for polluting the river and, at that particular time, and ultimately they set up a recycling system down there where they used the same water over and over again. The system is much the same as the Metropolitan Board's sewerage system where the water, when it's taken out of the river, is clean and used as pure water, and it is pure water, you can drink it, in the Mill and goes back to settling ponds where it's cleaned again and re-used. Now any water that they lose, and they do lose a bit through evaporation and the settling ponds over-flowing into an outside channel for which they're charged of course, the Metropolitan Board charge them for that, any of that water that is lost in that fashion they make up with fresh water from the river. Of course they don't manufacture paper now in Melbourne. That Mill has closed down altogether so pollution is not the problem there.

Melbourne Mill, of course, had the problem. I remember going across Princes Bridge on my way to work and the river would be red with the dye from the paper that was being made. But that has changed now. The Melbourne Mill is no longer a Mill for producing paper. They don't manufacture it there and that problem doesn't exist now. Incidentally, the water that was used in Melbourne Mill came from Dight's Falls. They bought it from the Melbourne City Council. The wooden pipes that watered the gardens was owned by the Melbourne City Council and A.P.M. just tapped into those pipes and bought the water that way.

When the wooden pipes collapsed in recent years they didn't bother to renew them again. The water that's used now to water the gardens there is our domestic supply and, of course, A.P.M. lost a cheap source of supply for water and had to go over to domestic supply in Melbourne. But here they use the river water. There is no factory water goes back into the Mill. There is water that goes back into the river. The only water that does go into the river from the Mill is turbine cooling water, which is pure water, it's clear. It's hot, of course, it's about 90-100° but that's downstream underneath the bridge where it enters the river. I was working in Melbourne Mill in 1934 when the big, what is known as the 'big flood' was on and although the Melbourne Mill was not closed through the floods, Fairfield Mill was. The water flooded right back up into the basement of the Mill and if you walk down and look underneath the Chandler Highway bridge you'll see the date 1934 - that was the height that the water reached and Mill Engineer at that time, Ernie Clay, went out in a rowboat and he put that up. Now how he managed to keep the rowboat still - he painted it up - that's his secret, I don't know how he did it but he did do it. But I well remember that A.P.M. owned a place down in Victoria Street, Abbotsford, which had been a Paper Mill but is used as a storage shed and I had to go down there and the water was right back up into the storage shed there and it was a fairly big height back off the river - a steep bank down to the river - the water had come up that high. But down under Green's Bridge and Princes Bridge, boats couldn't get under the bridge the water was that down there, although it didn't really affect the running of the Mill for some strange reason. It didn't come into the Mill, but other places around there got flooded out. I just thought I'd mention that because it is a rather interesting bit of trivia.

Queens

I suppose one aspect of social life in Northcote was the Sunday afternoon and evening excursions down to what was known as the "chicken run". The "chicken run" was where the girls and the boys used to parade up and down and, well, ogle each other off I suppose is one way of putting it. That was in High Street. There was a "chicken run" along Heidelberg Road from the bridge over the Merri Creek back to the Fairfield Park. Sunday afternoons the fellows who were old enough to have a pony and a jinker or a pony and buggy would parade there steeds up and down Heidelberg Road at that particular point. The girls and boys who didn't have those sort of conveyances would have to per-boot it up and down there. But, I suppose it's one aspect of my early years of comradeship, if you like, between the fellows and the girls.

The High Street Methodist Church in the 20's and 30's, there was a group of young men in the Church who were formed into a Mutual Improvement Society. It was called the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society. It was conducted by Mr. J. G. Membrey who had been the local Member of Parliament for the district of Jika Jika, which included Fairfield, Alphington, Northcote, part of Preston and part of Brunswick. When he retired from public life, he set up this group in the Church where we used to meet every Sunday afternoon; each person in the group would be expected to present a paper of some description. We would discuss it, probably arriving at conclusions which satisfied us but weren't conclusions at all, but at least it was doing one thing, it was sharpening everybody's mind up and making them aware that things were going on in the outside world. It also had prominent people in the community to come along and address the gathering and, well, we were encouraged to attack them if we thought they were wrong, which was surprising from a man of James Membrey's calibre because he was a conservative politician, if that's the right word to use, although his actions were not conservative.

Then of a Sunday evening, after the Sunday afternoon session, we'd all go to Church. Most of us played cricket in the Church team and one of the provisions for getting a game of cricket was that you had to attend Church. So that was one encouragement to go to Church and to get a game of cricket.

After Church we used to go down High Street for a walk, down to the "chicken run". The girls in the Church would do the same thing, although we never paired off. We'd probably have a talk down at the gardens on one of the seats and then go our various ways home. I should add that out of that Sunday afternoon class of young men, quite a number of them made names for themselves in public life, became Councillors. The late Harold Matthews, he was a Northcote Councillor. He was a member of that class. Alan Bird who was a Member for Batman up until 1954 when he passed away. He was a member, in fact, he was Secretary of the Class. Gray and Grays, the Solicitors in High Street. Three of them were all members of that class.

You may not think so these days, but Northcote was a very musical or cultural place. There was the Northcote Musical Society and later on the Northcote Choral Society, which was very successful in competitions in Ballarat, Bendigo, Sydney. They won championships. There was the Northcote Symphony Orchestra, which was formed by a gentleman named Basil Farrell who lived in Westgarth and was a teacher of the violin. What's become of him I wouldn't know these days. And, of course, the lamented Northcote Brass Band, which recently closed its doors, folded up because they couldn't get players. It's a pity to see that sort of activity being dropped. Northcote has produced some very fine singers and one that comes to mind is a girl named Freda Schwebbs. Freda Schwebbs' father was a Northcote Councillor, Karl Schwebbs, he was of German descent, born in Northcote and conducted his business in Northcote, which I think was a grocery business because his brother was a grocer in Russell Street, City.

Now Freda Schwebbs was trained as a singer. The people of Northcote sent her to England for further training and when she came back here endeavouring to get work, she was advised to change her name from Schwebbs to something else because it was a bit awkward for people to say, so she called herself Freda Northcote. She married a Northcote man named Ernest Wilson who was a very good singer and I believe they live in Balwyn somewhere these days. They were, for years, in St. Georges Road, but I believe they live in the Balwyn area where she was teaching singing in one of the girls' schools. Whether it was the Methodist Ladies College or the Presbyterian Ladies College I wouldn't know, but she was teaching singing in one of those schools. So Northcote has not been short on cultural activities over past years, but they're very short on them now.

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