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This is Mr. Roy Keeble of 14 Grandview Grove, Northcote - 29/6/1982

I'll just give you this short run through. If you want say Dundas Street, then it was Dundas Street. This side of Dundas Street there were all paddocks and Tower House. We used to go down the paddocks and ride the Shetland ponies.

What's the Tower House?

That's the big one on the top of Wales Street. I've never read any history of Northcote, but supposedly it was built there for Lord Pender who was coming out from England.

Who was living in there when you used to go and play round there?

As far as I can remember in those days, I'd say it was probably a chap named Davidson, because I know at the time the chap that was there was a bookmaker, because Dad said he could have bought that place, which came from Dundas Street down to Pender Street along to the lane and back to Dundas Street. The pigeon loft was there just in the stables at the back of the house. They're still there. We used to get up there in the pigeon loft, and the horses and the stables and one thing and another, he said he could have bought it for 800 pound. But anyway, that's where we used to ride the ponies down the paddock opposite in Dundas Street.

Where did you live then?

I still lived in Dundas Street, the old home is still there. When we went there first, I said to Dad, the trams finish here at the top. Yes, he said, in years to come we're going to run the trams through Dundas Street across to Heidelberg. You can look through Dundas Street straight across Heidelberg. They were going to put a bridge over there.

That was the story, was it, in those days?

That was those days. And a couple of times it came up in Councils hereabouts.

What year are we talking about?

I'd say when I came to Northcote, I was about 4. (1903)

And when were you born?

1904. The aunt walked me down from the paddock up here, like up that private hospital up there in Preston now, she was a cook. She walked me down and that's as far as I can ever remember of seeing my first home. We came down through tomato paddocks and crops.

I'd like to know something about the various crops and things that were growing. Tell me about those.

They were on the Preston side.

Was that a big nursery, or private homes, or market gardens.

They were market gardens. As far as Preston was concerned, I've got a book on the Preston Jubilee and you can take it with you and after you've finished bring it back.

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Talking about on the Preston side at Dundas Street, up there opposite the big main house, the tower house, the Railton Nursery came through to that first street, and it was a picket fence. From Tower Hill to where our house was, there was a corner shop, then there was another house on the Preston side down about 4 blocks. That was all the houses actually there. There was a brick carters, they used to bring the horses up, but that was all paddock.

Would that be the Goldsworthy's.

There were two or three of them there and they were on the corner of Victoria Street and Dundas Street. Opposite was 2 or 3 big homes, like they were up high with steps and that, I think Gibsons lived in one and Sampsons lived in another, Scotty Sampson, and then you went down a couple of blocks. There was no house on the corner, where the garage is on the corner of Victoria Street. The opposite side was Hawsers and about two more spaces or blocks further down was Alstons poultry farm.

Was it a very big poultry farm?

It was a block, just a house block. We called him Porky Alston because the father had a big stomach on him. When you went a bit lower down there was a house here and there and the rest was paddock, it was only wooden fence with a plain stretch of wire through. Then you get down to the top of Station Street, the oil lamp was on the top there, opposite was the Preston Dairy, he used to graze his cows just down there on the corner of Dundas Street. There was an old house there, it was falling over, and he used to graze his cows there with all boxthorn bushes round.

Did you know any Jones who had a farm up at the north end?

There was Frank Jones and Dinnie Jones - there was two. Actually speaking the saying was they were boxers. Because when this old home which you can see in Dundas Street there, I know they painted the roof where the chimney used to be in the bedroom there they took it out. I passed there a long time over the years and I said to the wife, God I wish they'd paint that damned roof of the house, it's just as it ever was, just the same place.

But anyway, the Dad built a sleep-out up about 6 feet, I think it's still there, just behind, and we were supposed to sleep in there because there were 3 boys. We never slept in it much because Jones, Dinnie Jones and Frank Jones, I suppose about a dozen of them, they used to come up and do a bit of boxing at the back of our place there.

Caswells, they lived on the paddock there. Then you went down from there to the oil lamp .....

What do you mean, the oil lamp?

Well, the street lighting. It was oil originally but then gas lamps. When we went to School, we used to come home and they'd put down the gas line and it came up Wales Street.

Was the gas lamp before or after the oil lamp?

The oil lamp was first. Because the gas, well I was going to School then, I'd be about 7 or 8. In fact we used to light cigarettes, make cigarettes. There was another down the corner of Jones Street, that's still there.

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So this Jones that you knew, they weren't farmers?

Not to my knowledge. Actually the farms that I knew of, there was a big oat farm down there on the corner of Sussex Street, oats and barley. Old Sampson chased us one day because we used to have fun as kids - they say what fun did you have in those years as kids - well our fun was knick knocks or anything like that. We'd drop those penny bung bungs you used to buy in a letterbox, and he'd come out and say "you've killed all my chooks" and out would come his daughter Alice. We got chased and we used to get in the farm through the fence and we'd go through the oats. We'd have no worries because he had one leg actually, it was taken off the right leg down at the ankle. He used to push a great wheelbarrow with all cauliflowers and go round the streets selling them.

Did he grow those locally?

Yes, down the back of his yard.

Whereabouts exactly was the block where they grew the oats?

That was on the corner - this paddock went from Sussex Street, why I say Sussex Street, there's no made street, it came into a paddock. That was our house, there's the hill, that would be Wales Street, Newcastle Street to there, that went straight through there, that was Railton's Nursery.

Who was the foreman for Railton's.

Brace, he was foreman for Railton's Nursery. We used to go up there - there were more hares than rabbits, but rabbits used to collect round Railton's Nursery.

More hares you say?

Oh hares down the paddock - we'd go out there no troubles chasing hares on Saturday mornings. This street here, living in that house was Cockeye, he was a policeman. He was kicked out, actually he retired from the police force in South Melbourne, all the mobs used to go round, because they kicked him. Reddy was his name.

That was all paddocks there. Then from there Raglan Street went through and then Victoria Street that's there, and then that went along there right down here to Station Street, it's still Station Street there, that was all oat farm and there's a great big gum tree on the corner there.

We're talking on the Preston side now. There was Railton's Nursery, then Raglan Street and then along here to Bell Street. Opposite there that was all paddocks, that was all tomato farms, they used to be Macedonian or something like that had those farms. And opposite there was Freddie Morgan's people, they lived there, the house is still there now. Freddie died some years ago now and his father owned all that property there and that was all farms there.

Then you went on from there you went back towards this house, one of my aunt's in the family was a General. Up there where it is now, like we've got a Medical Group up here in Northcote, there's one in Wood Street, its practically in line, that was all paddocks coming down there from Preston.

I know I started School at the Northcote School down here in Wales Street. Jerry Orr, he was there, Miss Woodgate she was another teacher, and that was the Prince of Wales School we always called it.

Actually when I left School there - in the family side from Bundaree when the farm broke up there, the grandmother died first then grandfather and I had 5 aunts and the farm broke up after that time. Old Auntie Jess she took me over and she brought me up.

Did you not have parents then?

Yes my parents were still home, but I was the middle son. Well the first one's the father's, the last one's the mother's, so the bloke in the middle - not that I was ever neglected or anything at all like that.

But your Auntie brought you up. Were you from a big family?

Only 3 boys and later a sister. Nevertheless, I was born in the bush and I was for company on the farm and I came back to Northcote School, Prince of Wales School, I came back just to finish my education and I as far as qualifying, the merit was due in January in the next year, so my mother said to me one day if you don't get a job today you go back to school, so I got a job.

You didn't like school very much?

I was right at the tail end, and in the space between home there and the bush, so anyway I left school when I was about 13½ and I never got my merit. All we learnt as far as I'm concerned was just general arithmetic, geography I wasn't keen on, dictation and memory. Unfortunately I suppose it's got me into troubles at times, but still I can retain a good memory. I can go back to these years, that's why I know these off pat, every little incident that's happened in my life. The Good Lord above has been very good to me, because brought up on the farm there, I'd run the farm with the old Aunt and then I give the farm away.

When the first War was on, the First World War, we used to wave flags on the Bungaree station to the troop trains.

In between the two, I was brought up mostly in the bush, but then in early life, see that scar there, we used to go from Dundas Street down to Shaftesbury Parade to the Church of England Sunday School down there, the wooden one, it was burnt out later and they built it again. I used to go down there and a house came up on the paddocks here and there and they put a fence round. Well I was going down with Alf's brother one Sunday morning and tried to meet the middle rail on the fence and I couldn't meet it, so I couldn't have been that old and that's the scar.

I think it was Doctor, no it couldn't be Doctor Meddleson then because it was the First World War Doctor Meddleson, we always said he learnt his trade in the First World War, but he was a mighty Doctor and then his son carried on. There was a Doctor Daley in Northcote, there was a Doctor Hannon and there was another Doctor.

Anyway they took me down to Nurse Keast in High Street, opposite the old tram sheds in High Street on the corner of Shaftesbury Parade and High Street where Biz Buzz are today, there used to be a private hospital there run by Nurse Keast. Doctor Daley I think was down opposite the Croxton Park hotel or the Croxton football ground. But anyway Doctor Hannon took me down there and they just sewed it up for me.

Northcote was then paddocks. Well take Penders Park after closer settlement moved in there, they used to have 6 to 8 teams to bring a house up, they'd bring them up on low loaders and they'd put them off on the jacks, used to wind them

down. I'm not sure where they come from, but I think they came from the Preston side because the horses used to pull in and they'd turn into Penders Street. I've thought over the years why that block of land was always left alongside a closer settlement, there was always a block left alongside. It might be perhaps the size of the house block which your on now, but over recent years I've driven past there many times and I've thought well that was where possibly they turned the leaders round, because all they did was brought the house in and put it down.

Was this a house being moved from somewhere else?

They called them closer settlement. They all came on a closer settlement see.

A new house or one that had been used somewhere else and was being moved to a new address?

It wasn't one, it was a lot. Penders Grove was a closer settlement and that ranged from Penders Street to Victoria Street and they were all closer settlement houses.

What were these closer settlement houses, were they brought from somewhere else on a dray by horses.?

Oh there were about 8 horses at least, heavy horses.

But where did the houses come from?

Well the Government must have brought them out, but I couldn't say definitely where they came from. They were a full house. Personally I think they were made, they might be like some of these Jennings houses, like built and brought out, and they used to bring them out on these low loaders, about 1912. They'd come from probably along Dundas Street, because they used to turn it and go down - at present where the Penders Grove hall is there used to be another hall there which was burnt down, a dance hall - well that lane there, they used to come down and around there, of course that hall wasn't there, and they'd come in that way and they'd just put them over the blocks and they'd let the jacks down. As you say, pre-fab, so therefore they'd be all marked out.

It always used to worry me, but I wondered why that block was so wide. It's like Sturt Street, Ballarat. The width of Sturt Street, Ballarat, down the bottom end, down near Bridge Street, well the width of that is on account of bullock teams. They used to bring the logs down and the bullock teams would wheel round and they had to take all that room. I think this one's possible the same. If you go up, well they'd all be built on now, but you can see the house.

Are there any notable people you can think of that were in the district at that time?

Like only different people we knocked round together and that sort of thing. Like George Alexander, he went up to Hutton's piggery and I think he was the electrical engineer up there - I'm going back possibly about 15 years ago - and George went from Hutton's, he went up to Wangaratta, he was electrician in charge up there.

When I first wanted to be a spark, that would be about 50 odd years ago, and you had to learn electricity and what was known of electricity. We never had Tech Schools to go to and that sort of thing. Today they've got tape recorders.

Colly Bell, George Alexander, there was Leeks. Leeks lived down the paddocks,

you mentioned before about Jones, well the Jones we knew were Frank Jones and Dinnie Jones. Then talking about boxing in those years there was a Kid Dale and a boy Dale, they fought down the stadium down there the Dales. They all knocked around the paddock down here.

Then there were different names, probably footballers and that, down here in the paddock in Northcote. Northcote in those years to me, when we came out of the Prince of Wales School, you stood on the steps there it was Station Street and there were that many ponds down there and swans and birds. It wasn't one great big pond, it was that black soil.

Can you remember what birds there used to be around there?

There used to be swans, plus possibly these little red what we called divers I think, little black ones with red beaks, just water birds. On the paddock from where we lived, say Dundas Street, you went down the bottom of Dundas Street, and there was two stone crushers there on what they call Chifley Drive today.

There were pot holes where they'd pulled out stone, we used to go down there after yabbies and that sort of thing. And that was in the paddock say from Station Street here opposite here, this was where Reddy the policeman lived, that was all paddocks down there and there was just an odd house here and there pock-marked along the paddocks, there were no great farms.

You went down to the Darebin Creek and it was great high blue scotch thistles and everything and a few stone walls, and in fact along Chifley Drive there were stone walls along there. As kids, a lot of the time we'd get down there, we'd pull stones out and we'd got a snake.

But those crushers there, we used to swim in what we called the Eland, it was a hole down below the crushers there. That was our swimming hole, we had a big gum tree there we used to dive off the top, not that I was a good swimmer but we always managed to dive there.

Those two crushers, they used to crush the metal there and you'd see it out on the roads here in Northcote and see it along different streets, there'd be piles and they used to break them up perhaps to fit into a section, a kerbing or something like that.

In later years we came here to live, the wife and I. After the War - we're twice round the wife and I, her husband was killed up there in the Islands, he got cut off up there in the massacre. I struck my dear wife during the war years when I was in the R.A.A.F. at Laverton and when we got married about 1948 and we came here after the War, we bought this place round here at the back alongside the flats, we bought it for 600 pound. It was 100 pound black market to a policeman, but nevertheless we worked on it and her son Ken, he's come back after an unfortunate broken marriage.

We got 2,000 pound for it after living in it for 18 months. Of course we put a front verandah in and I pulled the old lathe and plaster walls down, they were cracked. That was her job to take out the plaster. Then we found there was no base underneath, so I jacked it up with bricks and one thing and another and it wouldn't hold so eventually I put some concrete underneath it.

I can tell you our entertainment, say for the kids, entertainment was knick

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knocks. Then High Street, we'd go down High Street on the chicken walk. Nine o'clock closing Friday nights, the chicken walk Sunday nights. Of course there used to be bods round the streets, but they never interfered with us. The old Northcote pictures we'd go in there, silent pictures of course, the Thornbury pictures, we'd go in there and they'd strum up in the pits, the orchestra down in the pit.

Was this the Northcote picture theatre?

The Thornbury theatre. The Thornbury one is Dundas Street. There's Dundas Street, there's Plenty Road, you'd see a truck go up with pigs in.

Hutton's paddock, was that very large, more than a building block area was it?

Oh yes, that took the space from High Street here, Oakover Road there, down there to the railway line, there was a street along from there. Of course there was no overpass and no trams, that paddock took all that.

And what did they do there, did you say they had the pigs brought there did they?

All the pigs would come up, and they'd go through to the next station at Oakover Road there, I think it's Bell station. We'd know because you'd here the trucks going up and you'd see all the pigs. So we used to go up there when the killing was on, probably of a Saturday morning or something, and we'd see them killed and they'd slide them down and we'd get the bladders and we used them for our footballs.

Did you really, pigs bladders?

Pigs bladders, we used to get them down there. My job in Dundas Street was actually Saturday morning, plus the brother, mum would say go down and get the pork bones, so we'd come down and get the pork bones. Pattersons here, if they had any (and incidentally through there you'll see Patterson's shop) before my eyes went, many a time I used to go down to that shop. You'd come down Dundas Street which was composed mostly on the Preston of fir bushes and the gold finches used to be in them, and we used to get them, trapping finches and that sort of thing.

What did you do with the finches after you trapped them?

We never got that many. There were trappers in those days, they used to have a long net across the paddock and they'd be lying back when all the finches lobbed down in the paddock, they might be after a few oats of something.

What did they do with them, sell them at the market?

Possibly they did. I don't know whether shoots were about then. The pigeon shoots, I've seen pigeon shoots and sparrow shoots, but I don't think Preston had them.

Where were there sparrow shoots?

Sparrow shoots were up the country where I was, and starling shoots.