

# ORBOST & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

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## NEWSLETTER No. 121 September 2015

### *“Tired, not retired”*

It is said that farmers never retire. This is definitely the case with Bob Trewin who is nearing his 91st birthday. These days, he lives in Orbost with his daughter Kaye, and Bob’s farm is now owned and worked by his son and grand-son.

In this Newsletter, Bob recalls his life story and comments on the many changes in the Orbost district.



In the paddock at Jarrahmond, c.1980s  
Bob and a young helper offer a snack to one of Bob’s Hereford bulls.

My grand-parents, Cossy and Jane Trewin came originally from Cornwall in 1851 on the "John Knox" sailing ship, to Geelong and then to Ballarat.

From there, some Trewins went fossicking for gold, invested in land, some went to Wycheproof, some came to Gippsland, to Sale where they had farms, also to Lindenow, then to Orbost where they heard it was good land. Albert (called Abby) my father, came here in 1893 to join his two brothers who were already here.

My father was Albert Trewin b 1876 at Kingston near Ballarat, my mother was Hazel Somerville b 1894. They lived at "Hillview" at Jarrahmond, 3 miles out from Orbost on the B Road. Albert died in 1970 and Hazel in 1986.

Albert selected land at Jarrahmond. It had big trees which looked like "Jarrah" trees from Western Australia, and "mond" meaning "hill". He cleared the land with horses, bullocks, cross-cut saws, burned the stumps, burying some of the logs which were too big to burn.

Then he milked cows, planted maize, had pigs, drove the pigs to Bairnsdale or to Waygara (when the train came there), on a buggy track through the bush. Pigs went to the Dandenong bacon factory where they were turned into "Dandy" bacon. Bill Cummings was the agent for "Dandy".



ABOVE: Bob's parents, Albert 'Abbey' Trewin, and Hazel Trewin nee Somerville).

Dad was married twice. The first time he had four daughters, Eva (Mrs Royce), May (Mrs Jack Nixon), Bon (Mrs Jack Morgan) and Jean (Mrs Halloran). After his first wife died, he married my mother.

I was born 15<sup>th</sup> October 1924 in Orbost, in a nursing home for women, cnr. Gordon Street & Boundary Road. I'm 'T Model Ford' vintage. Babies were also born at home in those days since there was no public hospital.

Jack (in the hospital now) was my eldest brother, then myself, then a stillborn boy (baby Trewin) then Don (who died after falling off a ladder a few years ago).

I went to Jarrahmond School with about 15 to 17 kids in total, Trewins & Lynns mainly. Our teacher used to ride his bike out from Orbost on a terrible road which was mud and sand and hopeless after floods. He had to empty the night soil and do

everything at the School, poor fellow. Bete Bolong kids used to row across the river to join us for sports. We rode horses and had a horse paddock at School.

The school is no longer there, being closed and re-located to Brodribb, and then to Ruskin Street where it's in the TAFE grounds. It was just after the bitumen ends on the B Road. There's a dead pine tree on the left and a blue water hydrant on the right side of the road. Originally, the road used to go straight along the river, but after the 1934 flood, the road was re-made with a slight bend in it (as it is to-day).



ABOVE: The Trewin boys, 1930s. From left Bob, Don, and Jack.



ABOVE: Jarrahmond school site, now a paddock. Jarrahmond School stood in the foreground of this photo.

I've heard that there used to be an earlier school, down the bottom of Colin Trewin's place on the river bank, a slab hut type of building I was told. The second one was where I went to school.

We caught our horses before breakfast, rode around the paddocks to see the new lambs and report to Dad, then rode to school, came home at about 4pm, brought the firewood in, maybe milked the cow. We were always doing jobs on the farm. I was at Jarrahmond School for six years.

Then I went to Orbost Elementary School for two years. Again, we rode horses. The last boys in to the horse yard sometimes left the wire off the gate and the horses would go off down to Pardews

Lane. Mary Gilbert would tell us to go and catch them so we'd go and then sit down and have our lunches. Then I went to Caulfield Grammar for another two years as a boarder.

All the Trewin boys went there, along with the Lynns, Mosleys, and McKinnons. I was supposed to be there for four years, but came home in 1940 after two years because my older brother Jack had enlisted. I was 16 years old.

Mother used to buy the 140 lbs flour bags and 70 lbs sugar which she tipped into big bins. She shopped once a week on Friday afternoon. Everything was in paper bags. They would come in to shop at Herberts, or Baughursts (where the chemist is now), or F T Bullock (run by Syd Hardy), or Catos (Stan Hazeman ran that for a long time).

I remember the old Coolgardie safes with the water trough on the top, hessian hanging down with the meat inside. Then there was an ice chest, then kerosene refrigerators.

My parents grew maize, milked cows, had pigs, grew dried beans which we would take to Fishers Bean factory to get sorted. A lot of women worked there. We also grew green beans which went straight to Sydney and Melbourne. These were picked by Aboriginal women into 52 lbs bags, taken to Sydney by Stan Morrison in the 1940s. Local processing come along in the late 1940s.

**The War didn't worry us much.** There was rationing for sugar and tea and other things, also clothing, but we had fuel because we were farmers. Farmers were pretty self-sufficient. We had our own butter, soap and meat and grew things for the War. I was called up when I was 18 and wanted to go in the Merchant Navy but had to stay here and do farming. Initially, too many men were taken into the War, but then it was found that there were not enough to work the farms, so some of them were sent back.

I worked the farm, growing maize, beans, red-beet, carrots, cabbages. Later in the War, we had POWs working for us. Our vegetables went to the McLeod Street processing plant in Bairnsdale. We also supplied meat which was dried. Sugar beet was grown at Maffra for sugar. They tried it here but it was not successful.

A lot of things were hard to get, eg. Gillett razor blades. We used to swap things. We had blackouts on the buildings, houses, and covers on car headlights with small slits. We got shellite for lighting and mixed it with kero to run our cars. Farmers had cars, but not many others did. I had a car so was very popular.



**ABOVE:** Black outs for car headlights. These are on display in the Orbest Museum.

My mother made camouflage nets during the War for the Army. I remember three planes crashing at Marlo. One near the jetty. It was pulled back up to near the jetty and they put a guard on it. The local boys helped themselves to the fuel.

We had 70 acres and made a living, now you need 400 to 500 acres and a lot more cows. There were 2 houses on the farm, one for the worker's family. Our first tractor was a Twin City 1942 which we have still in our shed.

My first car was an old 1927 Chev. tourer. It could go anywhere like a Jeep. Then later I got a 1925 Ford V8 single seater with two doors. It was a good car with a boot which opened upwards so no one could sit in the boot as you could with 'dickie' seats. Norman Herbert and I used to go for trips, to Mildura, Kiandra and through the snow. Us lads used to go away on trips before I got married. Other young men used to borrow their father's car but I had my own car from about 1945. We got 20 gallons of fuel per month during the War. When I got married, I bought a Ford Prefect brand new.



**ABOVE:** Bob and his prized 1925 Ford V8 in the snow at Kiandra.

During the War, I did plane spotting for the RAAF from a shed with a top room which had windows around. It was in the Rec. Reserve (where they play croquet now).

**Betty Wilkinson and I were married in 1951 in Trafalgar.** We built our own house at Jarrahmond. Cecil Winchester told me how to build it. It was built of fibro cement sheets with the inside lined with masonite. The house is still there. Reg Macalister made bricks for chimneys. It was hard to get building materials, we couldn't get doors. We had to wait our turn. It was a small house by to-days standards with the dunny out the back.

Betty had come here with her father who was a sleeper cutter and he later worked for the PMG around Trafalgar. She was a telephonist there. We'd talk on the telephone all the time. I'd go down there about once a month. After 16 months, we got engaged, then married. We had nearly 60 lovely years together before Betty died in 2011.

**I still have the farm and am 'tired but not retired'.** Gary owns the farm now and has bought a lot more land too. His son Matthew is also involved. Our family is still farming.

Farming is different now, it's very expensive. Farms are a lot bigger and there's a lot less people working on the land now and



**ABOVE:** Bob and Betty's three children, Gary, Jeffrey and Kaye. The family always had boats.

they have a lot more machinery.

The first mechanical maize picker here was an International in the 1950s. It picked only a single row at a time and only picked the cobs off and didn't thresh them or take the husks off. It's now at Buchan and it's still in good order.

Before that, maize picking was done by hand. Good pickers would always have a 'cob in the air', throwing them into a heap. We took the husk off by hand with a tool a bit like a tin-opener. There was a lot of seasonal work then. It's all mechanised now, all that hand work has gone. A lot of employment has gone.

We also grew sun flowers. They were cut by hand by the Italian POWs, and then given to three or four women sitting in the back of a wagon where the heads were beaten with sticks to get the seeds out. The seeds would fall onto a big bean sheet in the bottom of the wagon.

When the vegetable processors came along in the 1970s, we could grow broccoli and green beans and peas. There was a cleaning factory near the Cemetery (now the Battel depot), where the beans were cleaned and washed and then taken to Melbourne. Companies contracted farmers to grow vegetables, companies like Edgell's, Frozo, Cottees, Wattepick, British Tobacco, and Garden Land.

Herbert's store is gone; the bank buildings are still there though not all are still banks, the old picture theatres are gone, as is the Big Garage. The beautiful G & N building (across from the Commonwealth Hotel) was torn down in the 1970s. It had one of those spring loaded things with the little canisters for the money. Dickens, and Herberts also had them in their shops. There's still one in Charters Towers.

We had five dance halls — Newmerella, Marlo, Brodrubb, the Mechanics Hall, and the Fire Brigade shed (they'd take the engine out and use the building for dancing). There was always something to do.

**Saturday afternoon** — hotels closed at 6pm and workers came in to guzzle the beer — everyone came in, all the timber & farm

workers and there were lots of fights. Timber workers camped out in the bush and came to town on a Saturday afternoon. It could get pretty rough.

We had a 32 volt plant on the farm at Jarrahmond with a Bamford diesel which we started for the power. The SEC power came in the late 1960s and we paid £17/17/6 a year to pay it off.

People have spare time now, and not enough to do. We didn't have any spare time. I remember the first TV coming. It cut out the picture theatres. Then there was a drive-in at Bairnsdale for a while. We went on picnics to Corringe with everyone sitting on a trailer behind a tractor with their legs over the side. You certainly can't do that now. We had a lot of good times.

Betty always cut my hair, but I can remember at least six men's barbers in Orbost at various times from 1940-1970s: Harold Roach, Lionel Nolan, Jack Halford, Cecil Platt, Jim McGinty, and another chap who was an Italian.

My father used to show cattle, also maize and beans. He showed at Orbost and Bairnsdale and also the maize and beans at **Melbourne Show**. We went to the Show every year, staying at my auntie's place at Caulfield or at the London Hotel (which is long gone). Dad had Hereford cattle. There's not so many Herefords here now.

**Like many farmers, Bob has had some accidents.** One day, I had three Hereford bulls out and I was on the horse. I went to cut one out, and one of the bulls put his horns into the stomach of the horse either side of the stirrups and tipped us right over and tore the horse open. The vet sewed him up and he recovered.

When riding home from school in 1939 during the bushfires, it was pitch black at about 3pm and the horse hit my leg against a post and tore my leg open and I still have the scars.

Another time I was kicked in the head by a horse and there was a lot of bleeding. I've had other accidents too, caught with the power-take-off from the back of the Twin City tractor when bean threshing. Twice I've lost my pants with the PTO.

- Bob Trewin was interviewed August in 2015 by May Leatch



**ABOVE:** Bob and Betty as many people will remember them.