

MAVIS HUNTER nee KING

This family history summary has been put together by the daughters of Leslie King and Ethel Anderson and presented here by Mavis Hunter. Les King ran a dairy and was well known as the St Albans milkman for many years. There are four generations of the King and Anderson families still living in St Albans, so the family is witness to the many changes that have occurred locally over the last century.

When Les King was born in 1894, Australia's total population was 3.4 million. It was the final decade of the nineteenth century and Australians were debating the question of federation, the possibility of amalgamating the separately governed colonies into one sovereign state, even as some final expeditions were setting out to explore the unknown centre of the continent. After twenty years of action, the women of South Australia were the first in Australia to get the right to vote and to stand for parliament. In the meantime, Sydney inventor Lawrence Hargrave was experimenting with flying machines, and in his box-kite contraption he astounded people by hovering fifteen metres in the air supported only by wind power.

Ethel Anderson was born in 1897, the year that produced even more modern technology—the horseless carriage was introduced to Australia as Henry Austin built Australia's first internal-combustion engine in the form of the Pioneer; it ran on kerosene and reached speeds in excess of ten miles per hour. As for information technology, the Morse code, a series of dots and dashes, was officially adopted as the communication method for post offices across Australia, which achievement was touted as Australia taking its place with the other civilised nations of the world. Australia's population had increased to 3.6 million.

Leslie Lennard King was born in Deer Park on 5th October 1894 to Melford 'Malcolm' Jacob King and Lucie King nee Riddell, in a house near where Nobels Explosives factory was. Leslie started school at Deer Park State School and always remembered that the flag was flown at half-mast there as a mark of respect for the death of Queen Victoria in 1901. As well as mourning the Queen's death, Australia also celebrated Edward VII's coronation in 1902. The children of Granddad Malcolm and Grandma Lucie King were:

- Maude (married Russell Roberts).
- Malcolm (married May).
- Margaret (Aunt Mag, stayed single).
- Stella Grantley (Don's mother).
- Leslie Lennard (my father, married Ethel Anderson, my mother).
- Lucy (married Viv Rogers).

The King family moved to a farm in Main Road St Albans in May 1902. Malcolm's occupation was a carpenter-builder, but, as usual at the time, people were living on a few acres and also raising some stock or planting crops to support the family. This farm was about eighty acres and they had dairy cows. It was on the south side of Main Road West about where Emily Street comes out, down to the bridge that used to be called Crosbie Bridge. That's the old farm; Grandma's farm we used to call that.

Leslie King talked about the first schoolhouse in St Albans, which was in Adelaide Street at the time, but he would have started school at Deer Park. When the family came here in 1902 the new school, State School 2969, was already built in West Esplanade on the corner of Ruth Street running south of the school.

After finishing his schooling Leslie King worked at the small quarry¹ in St Albans on the south side of the railway station before he bought his own farm. At the time this quarry was one of the few local places of employment, and young lads were lucky to get a job as a labourer; the spallers and powder monkeys required more knowledge and experience. Our farm was called Plainfield's Dairy. It was 150 acres in Kings Road, St Albans. Of course it wasn't Kings Road at the time; that was named later, after our family.

¹ By the late 1920s quarrymen worked a 44-hour week, and a 14-year-old school leaver might earn 25/- per week.



St Albans State School in early 1900s

The Anderson family, i.e., Mum's family, moved to St Albans in about 1910 from Campbellfield. Most of the people in the area were living on small farms, and indeed it was the possibility of selecting a small farm that was the attraction for new settlers. The family settled in Taylors Road near Theodore Street and here they took up the farming life by cultivating crops. The current owners have just renovated the old home and built town houses around it; that was Grandma Anderson's house.

Peter Anderson and his wife Hannah had three sons and three daughters:

- Fred (18.2.1896) married Alice Stenson, whose home was where the Catholic manse now is.
- Ethel (18.12.1897) married Leslie King; my parents.
- Myrtle (12.10.1899) married Clyde Gillespie from Melton.
- Evelyn (7.4.1904) married George Smith from Essendon.
- Horace (28.6.1907) married Babs Wilson, also a local person.
- Keith (24.11.1911) married Margaret Griffiths.

Ethel Maude (that's Mum) was born on the 18th December 1897 and married Leslie King on the 28th April 1920. They met when they were at the state school in St Albans. Mum was there only a couple of years as she had started school in Campbellfield. They established a close friendship after they'd finished their schooling. Mum rode ponies a lot and she would ride down to meet Dad as he left work at the quarry. I think he rode a bike.



St Albans Presbyterian Church in early 1900s

They married in 1920 at the St Albans Presbyterian Church, the first wedding to be held at the church, now known as the Uniting Church. Dad had the flu at the time and his wedding photos show that. They went to Olinda for their honeymoon, which was seen as a real country retreat with its lovely gardens and surrounding forest. They became farmers and later dairy farming people when Leslie started a milk round in the Sunshine and St Albans areas.

In 1921 Leslie and Ethel had their first child, Mavis Jean, (i.e. me) on the 8th January 1921 at the Sunshine Hospital. Phyllis Maude was their second child on 8th December 1922, and Beryl was born on 20th October 1925. Then a son was born, but he did not survive.

Dad did the milking with Mum and later on with the girls. He used to get extra milk and cream from Phil Hill's farm in Biggs Street on the corner of Three Chain Road, which is now Sunshine Avenue.

Mum and Dad were very good parents for their family, and we had a very happy life. Dad was always lovely, always ready to help everybody. Mum was more quiet and reserved, a homebody really. She was good at baking, knitting, sewing, crocheting ... all the home crafts later carried on by her daughters and some of her granddaughters.

Mum always made butter. She had chooks and eggs, and she took them to Dickens, who was a grocer on the corner opposite the Deer Park Primary School. Mum or one of us would cut the chaff to feed the animals. The chaff cutter was horse driven. The hay was fed into the cutter by hand, and it was not easy work.



In the early 1920s, Jack Richards started Richards Dairies in the Sunshine area, so Leslie sold his Sunshine part of the milk round to them and concentrated on the St Albans part. Each Christmas the customers would receive a milk jug or sugar basin as a present from the milkman.

After finishing delivering the milk about lunchtime, Leslie would harness up the Clydesdale horses and put a crop in or take it off, whatever the case was, for that time of year—a very busy man.

When one of the horses from the milk cart had to be shod, Kit her name was, she was taken to James Hutson's place on the outskirts of St Albans near the corner of Arthur Street and Taylors Road. He was the first farrier in St Albans and used to shoe horses after he finished his other work. He worked as a blacksmith at McKays making ploughshares, and later on he was with Ralph McKay when he set up on his own. We told Mr Hutson that after Kit was finished being shod he should let her go home by herself but not before the Bendigo train had gone through about two o'clock, because she had to cross the railway line about two or three miles from home. She'd trot off home on her own because she knew the way and we always left the gate open with a bin of feed waiting inside for her.

Later the horses had to be taken to Sunshine to Lynches Garage on the corner of Ballarat and Hampshire roads. It was a lovely opportunity for us, because while the horse was being shod we could go to Sunshine to look at the shops. There were only a few shops and a post office agency in St Albans, while Sunshine had chemists, doctors, and clothing shops.

Things were bad in the Depression years about 1930–36. I remember horses using some of the empty Coleman houses as shelters because people couldn't afford the repayments and just walked out. Dad had the milk round, of course. People were out of work and were giving vouchers to pay for their milk. Dad would redeem the vouchers for money

from council or government. Other vouchers were for food. People used to work making roads and on other jobs to earn these vouchers.

The St Albans milk round continued until 1949, when it was sold to Bill Stewart. It was also the end of an era in the sense that delivering fresh milk straight from the cow was no longer considered the best practice. 'Safe milk' was the call by women's organisations as, for health reasons, people wanted to get pasteurised milk, i.e. milk that had been heat treated to prevent infection. A real fear was that dairy products could become contaminated with the tuberculosis bacterium and thus infect people with TB. In 1949 state parliament introduced the Milk Pasteurization Bill, which required the milk supply to be treated. This meant that milk for sale to the public was now being processed in factories and commonly sold in bottles. There would be no more young callers bringing their own jug to get a fresh, creamy and steaming pint straight from the cow to the breakfast table.

Bill Stewart, who bought the milk round, was Ilsa Searle's brother. He'd built a dairy in Main Road East, opposite the Errington Reserve sports ground. The Stewarts lived in the Kings Road farmhouse for a while. At the time the township was getting bigger. In the early days there were fewer than two hundred people around, then in the 1940s it had increased to eight or nine hundred, so milk delivery was also increasing. In 1950 the government introduced free milk to children in primary schools, which continued until the 'seventies. It was introduced as a way of supplementing the diet of children, so at each morning recess they would get their small bottle of free milk. This scheme would also have increased the local milk delivery business, particularly with the increase in schools and school children in the mid 'fifties. Stewart's dairy became part of Croftbank Dairies. Home deliveries of bottled milk by horse and cart continued for quite a while, and it was still going in the late 'sixties.

When Les sold off the milk round, he and Ethel moved back to the old farmhouse in Main Road (Grandma's old house). They had bought the old farm from the other members of the King family and built a new house next to the old one for themselves, and one on the other side of the road for Dad's sister, Auntie Mag. Later on he sold the old family home to John Thornton. He was the man who started building half-houses for the many migrants coming to St Albans and all around.

Mr Thornton developed the farm into housing lots for the migrants at that time and introduced half-houses to St Albans, which helped people to settle easier. Then when they paid off that half, they added the front of the house. It was great to see the finished houses. These migrants made St Albans. Before that we had nothing. We would go to Sunshine for the doctors and for medication. I used to take my children back to the doctor in Sunshine. Now we have the big doctors coming out of town.

Leslie bought his first car from Mr Thornton's son, Richard, in about 1952, so he was quite a late starter at driving, Dad was.

Mum and Dad loved the Royal Melbourne Show that is held in September each year. Judging Day was the only day of the year that Dad would have off from the milk round, when he got a man named Richards to do it. Someone from the family went every day to the Show, as the kids loved it too. Dad was always a member of the Royal Agricultural Society.

Dad was interested in and good at making bridles and other leatherwork. He taught Gail Gillespie, who was a granddaughter, and she was the only grandchild who competed in horse riding, quarter horse cutting, and leatherwork.

As kids we went to St Albans School 2696. I was there from 1926 to 1934. The Griffith girls, Margaret and Marjory, took us to the Sunday school at the Church of England. Margaret took us to school for a few years driving a pony and jinker, which she tied to the fence in the Church of England grounds until it was time to go home again. Margaret later married Mum's brother, Keith Anderson, and became our Auntie Margaret. Later on, we walked to school and home again. We walked with the children of the McAuley family. They were from a nearby farm near the railway line. Sometimes we were allowed to come across the paddocks, a much shorter walk, but in summer there was the fear of snakes and in winter there were a couple of gullies that flooded in the rain and were dangerous.

I went to school for three years without missing a single day, which was pretty good, I reckon. We had to walk two miles there and back. We were lucky we were healthy as kids. I

remember that Iris Brown didn't miss a single day of schooling in all the time she was at the school.

Other pupils in the class included Jessie Lewis, Edna Power, Alma Hale, Irene Douglas, Maisie Cornhill, Joan Goddard, Edna Siddal, Iris Brown (whom I've already mentioned), Keith Wilson, Nellie Dennis, Jean McKintosh, Mary Stein, Arthur Dale, Harold Toby, Ron Wilson, and Alan Turner. The class photograph is now old and faded, but you can still recognise the faces.

As well as going to school, for a while I used to go to Mrs Errington's house in Circus West for music lessons. They taught how to play the piano there.

About 1936 I went to live with Auntie Maude and Uncle Russell Roberts in Miller Street, North Fitzroy, to help them with a shop they had. The uncle died there in 1939. He got up early one morning as usual to buy the produce for the shop, and in the afternoon he lay down for a rest and died. It was very unexpected and quite traumatic.

After finishing school my sister Phyllis stayed at home to help around the farm. Then in 1942 she and I went to Nobels Explosive Factory for about eighteen months. After finishing her primary school, Beryl went to the Sunshine Technical School and then worked in Footscray for a man named Gordon Dennis, for seven years.

Mum and Dad celebrated their silver wedding in April 1945. The anniversary was celebrated at Grandpa and Grandma Anderson's home, because they were celebrating their fiftieth anniversary at the same time; they had retired to 4 Arthur Street at the time.

Later on Dad got his licence to drive a car, quite late in life, around 1952. At one stage he had a truck he had driven into the shed. Next day he went to reverse it out of the shed and couldn't find the gear, so he said to his son-in-law: 'Arthur, I don't think this truck has a reverse gear on it.' So he took the back off the shed and drove the truck out forwards. Lucky there was room to do this. This was on the Main Road farm. After that he managed cars very well, driving right up to the day before he died. He took Mum shopping at the St Albans shops.

In 1962 Dad sold Plainfields. The quite little town had suddenly started to expand from the central area and out into the surrounding farmlands, which were gradually being converted to residential living. Dad donated 10 acres of farmland to the Keilor Shire Council so that the St Albans Football Club would have a football ground; the value was about £10,000. Dad was the timekeeper for the club and also marked the ground. In 1958 Dad got a stopwatch in recognition for his voluntary work for the club. Today there is a nice building on that donated ground and the St Albans Bowling Club is there too. There are pokies at the football club and nice counter meals. The football ground is in Gillespie Road. Many of our names were used in naming the streets in the new area known as Kings Park. Dad kept twenty blocks around Mallee Court at the top end of Kings Road and Taylors Road. He gave each of his grandchildren a block of land and there was one each for his three girls.

In 1970, Mum and Dad's golden wedding was celebrated at The Nuts in Alfrieda Street by their family, grandchildren, and friends.

Mum and Dad bought a new home in Kings Road, Kings Park, shifting in there in 1975 on the same day as my daughter Janice and her husband Peter shifted into their home in Mallee Court.

During the latter part of his lifetime Dad bought a small farm in the Bulla area; you turned off the Bendigo Highway near the Thunderdome in Sydenham. Later it was sold for farmlets and Dad bought another farm along the Keilor-Melton Road in Sydenham West. It was a piggery at the time, but he bought it so that he could continue to pursue his interests in cattle breeding. Dad was well known at the Newmarket sale yards for his dealing with cattle. Many a happy Sunday afternoon we spent at that Sydenham farm with our families.

My parents' diamond celebration was a small party at their place in Kings Road, but Dad lived only five more months after that diamond wedding anniversary.

Dad died of a massive stroke on the 17th September 1980, very suddenly, at the age of eighty-five. He had lived eighty years in St Albans and had seen the place grow from a small rural village to a thriving metropolis of over 40,000 people. It must have been an enormous change.

Our world certainly changed after his death. Mum seemed to be a different person as she had known Dad since school days, and it appeared as though she couldn't bear things that were different. She was a different person and hard to manage. We had to give up her home and sell it. Mum went into a nursing home in Queenscliff in 1984. We seemed to be attracted to Queenscliff; we'd stay the weekend at a motel and visit her regularly. She was there four years until one morning the nurse rang home and said she had passed away on 30th May 1987.



I married Bill Hunter in 1943 and we wanted to build our home, but it was a very difficult task and took us a long time to get started. This was during the war. There were no new houses being built, and there was very little building material available to build your own. Dad bought the block of land in Erica Street for £35. There were four blocks and the agents said, 'Why don't you buy the four?' Dad said, 'No. I only want one for my son-in-law and daughter.' So he bought that and we paid him off because we didn't have the money. We built our house in stages. One of the chaps with whom Bill worked would come on the weekends and help with the house construction. Bill had subcontracted a lot of the work, but at least we could pay for it at the time because Bill was working a lot of overtime.

Nobels had had a big explosion and Mr Dickson's son-in-law was killed in that explosion. Bill worked weekends a long time. He said the explosion might not have been good for others, but it was good for us because the overtime

helped us build the house.

We didn't get into the house straight away; it must have taken two to three years to build it. We finally got into the house in 1955. Even then we had tin over many windows because we couldn't get windows. We lived in the back of the house and worked on it whenever we could. Mr Timothy Quinn in Millawa Avenue did our plastering. Bill worked for ICI for over thirty years. He got the bricks for the fireplaces from there because they had bricks left over from making some chimney stacks.

Our son Lennard was born on 5 September 1945. There were no doctors in St Albans in the early years, so I used to take my children back to the doctor in Sunshine for a checkup. Now there are plenty of doctors in St Albans and we even have the big doctors coming out of town.

When Lennard was at high school a teacher came to me and said, 'Do you know your boy is not happy at school?' I said I wasn't aware of that, so I spoke to him, and he confirmed that he wasn't and that he would like to leave. I said to him, 'Well, you get a job and you can leave school.' What he really wanted to do was to be in the railways and drive trains. He had to get a medical for the railways, so we took him in and he was accepted. My mother had gallstones at the time, and I thought it was the end of the world she was so sick, but at least we were able to do the right thing by Lennard. It must be two years since he's retired, so he's spent thirty-eight years with the railways driving trains and then working in the yards. His wife, Sue, was working with the Reserve Bank and she retired after thirty-two years. That is eighty years of service between them in the same jobs.

My daughter Janice was born on the 11th November 1949. She went to the local state and high school, and then worked for several years at the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works. In 1972 she married Peter Greenland from Footscray. They have two boys: Darren James, and Brent William. They now live in Mallee Court St Albans. Lennard and Sue also live in that area at the time of writing.

Mavis Hunter nee King, 2004