

Transcript of Recorded Interview by Jackie Tidey with Les Mowat of Unit 2, 70 Patterson Street, Middle Park, Thursday 22nd May 2014.

Les was born in Cressy, near Ballarat on 30th October 1919. He had an older sister, Eileen and an older brother, Campbell, both now deceased. Les never married but he is still very much in touch with his brother's children and grandchildren.

I came to Middle Park in 1941 from Cressy [near Ballarat].

My father was in partnership there with his brother... and then his brother died so we had to split up the estate and divide the proceeds among the family. We had a small property but my father was [also] a carrier and contractor... and his brother did the town carrying but my father went out carting wool, carting wood, putting down dams, working on roads, doing anything like that... and I worked with him... until I was 21 and came to town.

The War Years

I more or less went straight into the army then... I was 21, going on for 22. That was 1941. I had just finished my National Service Training and we were compulsorily called up when the Japs came into the war and I was in the war until May 1946.

[With the army] I went to Western Australia first, in the Geraldton district... we were supposed to be protecting that area. Then we came back and went to Mangalore for a while. Then we went to D'Aguilar for a while, that was 50 or 60 miles out of Brisbane... there was only a hotel and a post office there. Caboolture was the railhead... Woodford was the main town... we used to get the buses to go back to the camp. We did our jungle training in the Glasshouse Mountains.

At the end of the war I came back to Middle Park. We always had a house in Middle Park, in Erskine Street. It had belonged to my aunt and she left it to my mother. It was at 81 Erskine Street.

My name [Mowat] was originally French. According to my brother, who worked at the Herald and Weekly Times as I did later, (he was a compositor there) and he had a great friend who was an historian. He gave my brother a paper from Glasgow on the history of the Mowats. They came over from Normandy in France in the 12th Century and settled in the Orkney Islands. My great grandfather came out here from the Orkney Islands, must have been before 1853. Funnily enough my cousin married another Mowat and her name had two 'ts'... once when I was in Prince Henry's hospital a nurse who was Scottish said to me "Your name is Scottish and it's as common as Smith in the north of Scotland..."

Post-War Years and Working at A.W Allen's Confectioners

My father got a job in the government and I got a job in A.W. Allen's, the confectioners in South Melbourne ... which is no longer there. Allen's was near Sennitt's Ice-cream where Southbank is now. [The factory] was in Brown Street, along Riverside Avenue, near the ice-works, across the river from Flinders Street Station.

In response to a question about how he got to work Les said:

"In those days our tram [what is now the 12] used to go along Sturt Street, and the Victoria Avenue tram [now the 1] used to go down Clarendon Street. They changed it to avoid the turn... it used to turn around... and then I switched to the train... I used to get a yearly rail ticket it was much cheaper. I used to go on the train from Middle Park to Flinders Street.... We used to say if we only had a bridge across the river we

could just walk across and save a long walk around and of course now there is a pedestrian bridge across the Yarra.

In those days Allen's used to be great on Steamrollers and Fruit Tingles, In other sections they did toffees and Butter Menthols, Cure 'em Quick, the little black things you would put on your tongue. Roy Rene (Mo), the comedian used to advertise Irish Moss gum jubes... "You can feel them doing you good," on the radio. He was a great comedian... at least a famous comedian.

At A.W Allen's I started work at 7 am and finished at 3pm... that was for a long, long time...then they did the dirty on me. I was on Group 1 plus a bit over that...and then there was a wage rise but they told me I'd [now] be on Group 2. They wouldn't take any money off me but it meant I wouldn't get any pay rises at all for years until I got up to a standard of Group 1 again. So I decided to leave and I joined the Herald and Weekly Times. I was 48 at the time and I stayed there until I was 65 and I retired. I loved working at the Herald and Weekly Times.

Working at the Herald and Weekly Times

I was in The Sun Publishing room, on the day staff. We took all the newsagents' orders and wrote them down for the girls to collate upstairs. I was called a Booking Clerk and I finished up in charge of the room for a while until I retired. We used to put the figures on the wrappers, if they [a newsagent] wanted say 700 papers, we had to work it out whether there were 75 in the bundle, or 100 in the bundles. It was all done manually... when the night staff came along all they had to do was work out how many bundles from the wrappers.

I worked from 8am until 4pm... but in our job you really had to work until you finished. If you worked overtime we didn't get paid for it... we never got any extra for public holidays. We only got two public holidays a year. We didn't work Sundays because there were no Sunday papers then. We only worked 5 days but it was over a six day period. Only a limited number worked on a Saturday. We had a day off during the week. Right up to the time I retired we never got paid any more for working on a Saturday or working on a Monday or a Tuesday but then they gave us 25% extra of our daily wage for working on a Saturday. The perks were excellent, we got six weeks and two days annual leave. They were really good to us.

Sometimes at the end of the day I'd be tired and glad to finish. The day that Armstrong walked on the moon [20th July 1969] was the busiest day ever. That was an exhausting day... we kept running extra papers, extra papers. It was really bedlam. We had to knock off at lunchtime because the Herald was printed on the same presses as the Sun was printed.

After work we went down the pub... and my friend Jim Harney and I used to deliver bouquets...it finished up a really big company. He had a partner Mal Rudd who was an ex-detective in the police force. They'd had a garage business and then they branched out into this flower delivery business All the different flower shops would get them to deliver... they would pick up bouquets or deliver wreaths. Sometimes they even hired taxis, say on Mothers' Day, to deliver the flowers. This would have been in the 1970s.

Involvement with Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Middle Park

That's how I got really involved in the parish [Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Middle Park].... A chap named Jack Hoy who had a grocer's shop at the corner of Montague Street and O'Grady Street was the secretary of the parish and he really ran the parish...he got on well with Fr McAlpine and I used to help him, and then Jim Harney who was a great friend of mine, he came into it too. Well [one day] Jack Hoy had a cerebral haemorrhage and he couldn't say anything anymore. He could understand everything you were saying but

he couldn't speak. He would never swear but after the haemorrhage all he could say was 'Bugger Bananas'. So we had to take over... we used to run a Silver Circle... and one week someone won it but we didn't know who she was. She was a lady that Jack Hoy used to deliver groceries to and somehow he used to charge the Silver Circle to her account... she was sort of paying for it on her grocery bill. Ken Cahill came to me one day, he was the postman then, and he said he knew who this lady was who had won the Silver Circle but I didn't know where she lived and Ken Cahill told me where it was. I went there and we became great friends... she was Church of England I think.

Fr Pilkington was the Parish priest then, he was a South Australian... and the Carmelites had a place at Portsea, where they used to have their holidays... in those days they had a lot of seminarians and we used to go down there on a Monday... Jim Harney and Fr Pilkington they used to go down every Monday and play golf because the Secretary of the Golf Club was a Catholic and he gave them the privilege of playing golf down there. Fr McAlpine was Prior here at the time (in the 70s). He was Provincial from 1972--1979 and they were great days then. We were also great friends with the publican at the Beaconsfield, Daniel Mannix Curtain whose daughter Elizabeth is now a Supreme Court Judge.

Middle Park was a very big parish when we first came. My mother used to get onto me to get there early on Sundays so we could get a seat. In those days there were so many Masses 6.30am, 7.30am, 8.30am, 9.30am, 11am.

Life in Middle Park 1950s,'60s,70s

In response to the interviewer asking Les if he could remember migrants coming to Middle Park in the 1950s he said "I was aware of Greek people coming to Middle Park in the 1950s...mostly [what I remember is] there was a place in McGregor Street where they said there were three shifts of people living in the one house and there was a big to-do over it. We had a Greek family living next door to us and I was invited to their daughter's wedding."

Were there lots of milk bars in Middle Park at one time? Practically one on every corner. They had small grocery businesses too. There was a milk bar next door to this house (44 Langridge Street). There was a lovely old lady there... I'd come in and buy my milk and she'd give me a lolly. There was also one on the corner of Richardson Street and Erskine Street and then there was another on the other corner of Richardson Street. It was absolutely crowded with them. And there was another one in Mills Street.

There was a woodyard on the corner of Harold and Erskine Street and Tom Hayes had a horse and dray in a place just down Erskine Street and he was one of the last horse and draymen. His family home was in 303 Richardson Street.

We used to have the iceman come round .One of the boys from Cressy used to work for the iceman...he had a motor vehicle in my day. We got a fridge in the 60s but before that we had an ice-chest and the block of ice [was delivered] every Saturday morning... it used to last a week and used to be delivered in a gunny sack.

There were a lot of rented houses... Farnsworths (who owned the dairy) used to own a lot of houses... Bill Farnsworth used to go around collecting the rent. They used to have their dairy in Hambleton Street, just up from Harold Street. That was the first place I went to get some milk when I came to Melbourne. They sold it in bottles or buckets... there used to be a chap too who came around on Sunday morning selling cream. You'd take your jar or whatever you had outside and get cream from him...

When I asked Les if he remembered anyone coming to the door selling things in days gone by he said that he couldn't remember anyone in Middle Park but he did remember hawkers in the country. "We had Indian

hawkers in the country, on their horse and buggy. Charlie Scott was one, he was Indian. I don't remember his real name but we used to call him Charlie Scott. He was a great old character."

"The bank manager told my father that it was the retired people's place... Middle Park... in the 1940s it was for retired people. The bank manager used to go to school with my father. A lot of the league footballers used to board in Canterbury Road and they used to come to Our Lady of Mount Carmel on Sunday. Laurie Nash was one of them. My barber, Ted Watson... they used to all go down there for a haircut... there was a place next door to the bike shop on the corner ... and he was the barber in there. Kevin Hogan, Des Barry and John Leveridge and another boy I think his name was Crouch... they were all footballers from around here. I had a great friend then who was a Carlton supporter and he'd join in... We used to have a Holy Hour after church and we used to talk football after church. We used to have great fun. In those days the church used to be so crowded... lots of big names, e.g. Bourke's who used to own Bancrofts Drycleaners. He became a member of the Knights of the Southern Cross. I think they sold their business but the name was still used.

I always barracked for South Melbourne, or at least I did once I came to Melbourne, before that when I was in Cressy I barracked for Geelong. I used to go to the pictures The Park Theatre in Bridport Street and the Kinema in Victoria Avenue... on Saturday night everyone went to the pictures, that's where you'd take someone if you were taking them out and you'd have to buy a girl a box of chocolates if you were taking her to the pictures.

I wasn't a dancing man but I used to sell the tickets at the big Balls we used to have... The big Whitefriars Ball for the Carmelites was held at the Palais and I used to work with a chap called Bill Henry and we would sit in the foyer and give them the tickets when they arrived. We'd be waiting and so we'd be involved but not really at the dance.

I don't remember any restaurants or cafes much but I used to go to the Middle Park pub and the Beaconsfield pub, the one that's closed now [because of the incident there with the cricketer David Hookes]. Dan Curtain was the publican there in the 70s, he ran a wonderful hotel for a number of years until he retired. He became a great friend of mine and Jim Harney's and we used to take Fr Pilkington and Fr McAlpine down there on a Saturday night to watch the trots on TV and Tattsлото being drawn. Dan Curtain was a great host to the priests and to us and treated us rather well. We had a couple of 'do's' at the Emerald, that's in Clarendon Street, but I myself didn't go to Billy Bell's much, although other parishioners did and so did my nephew...

Tom Hayes from the woodyard used to stable his horse in Erskine Street and the butchers' shop in Hambleton Street was a great place to hear all the gossip. My mother and my father used to go there. They were real family butchers. Then there was Cunningham's next door, corner of Hambleton and Harold. Cunningham's the grocers were a family shop, if you wanted cheese, say, they would take a big lump of cheese and cut a slice off... they were a grocer's shop in those days where you had to be served. The biscuits were in tins and they would put some in a paper bag and it used to take a while to get everything, depending on how much talking and gossip you wanted to do. Later on there was a supermarket there.

My mother died in 1966 and my dad died in 1971. My father used to do the cooking during the week and I would do it on Saturdays. And then my father would do it on a Sunday. After my father died, one day when I was finishing up after Mass on Sunday, [Les was the sacristan at OLMC for years] Fr McAlpine, who was the Prior [at OLMC] said to me "I suppose you have to go home and cook now". When I said "Yes", he said "Well you had better come into the priory and have Sunday lunch." And so I did and I have been having it there every Sunday ever since, for more than 40 years. There have been some wonderful Carmelite priests over the years, they were really priests of the people, they were always there for the

parishioners: Fr Pilkington, Fr McAlpine and (with prompting from the interviewer) yes, Fr Shane, he was probably a bit more light-hearted than them. I've known all the Carmelite priests. They were all in the same mould. I can remember Fr Pilkington had studied and been ordained in Rome and he could speak Italian quite fluently. He was able to hear confessions in Italian from old Italian parishioners.

Thoughts on Middle Park

When I asked Les if he had ever considered moving away from Middle Park as his brother had, he said "I have never considered leaving... I love Middle Park I would hate to leave it... it's so convenient, and it's so good living near the beach, even though I'm not a beach boy. When I was at the Herald I had chaps working down at say Aspendale or Cheltenham... my boss, he lived in Heathmont. I could never understand it, they spent half the day travelling to work whereas I just strolled in every day from Middle Park. And Middle Park is so friendly, everyone smiles at you, even the young girls, they never would have when I was young but now I'm an old man everyone is so good to me."



70 Patterson Street, Middle Park



81 Erskine Street, Middle Park