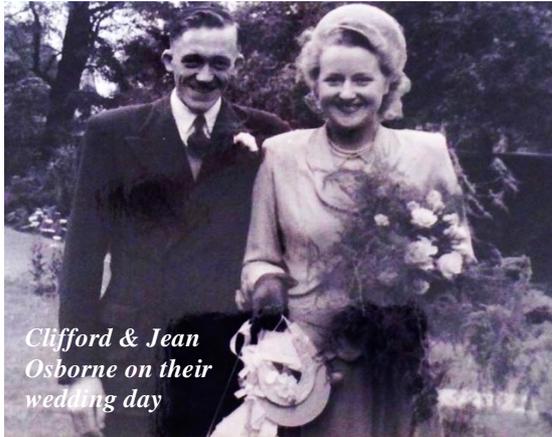


PLOD ESSAY:

Welcome to Wonthaggi



*Clifford & Jean
Osborne on their
wedding day*

Clifford Osborne, from Nottingham, was a radio direction finder in the air force during the war. While the war raged, he worked alongside Aussies stationed near his camp, and he learned to admire them immensely. He said they were most irreverent; they never saluted anybody, not even a major general. "Why should I?" they'd say. "He's no better than I am!" Clifford saw they could do everything under the sun and he didn't know how they could get away with it. He was especially fascinated by the skills they used to make under-cover stills for their entertainment. He decided that when he was de-mobbed, he would emigrate and become an Australian.

He went back to Nottingham, got work, met Jean Osborne and wanted to marry her. However, he hadn't forgotten his dream of going to Australia. Clifford's idea was to secure the engagement and then take off for Australia to set things up before he brought Jean down under.

Jean's mother gave Clifford a word of advice: "Jean has been spoiled since the day she was born. Her father and brothers didn't know that she was the naughty girl that she was. Clifford, you can ask her to marry you, but don't go to Australia without her because there are plenty of fellows waiting to step in when you leave."

Back in 1948-49, an Englishman didn't have to have a job to emigrate, but he needed a sponsor and a home to go to. A Mrs Esther Hand, from Wonthaggi, had come to Nottingham to visit her family after being separated for a great many years by the war. She let it be known that she was willing to be a sponsor. When she met Clifford and Jean

Osborne, she immediately took them under her wing.

After the emigration papers were lodged and Mrs Hand had gone home, Clifford and Jean married. As Jean tells it, "Because I knew nothing about contraception – no one did in those days – I got pregnant. I wrote to Mrs Hand that we were now married and I was pregnant, but still no papers. Mrs Hand wrote back immediately and said to write to Australia House and tell them I was pregnant and they would get us on a boat as soon as they could. Well, within a few weeks we were on our way to Australia!"

Mr George Hand and his wife, Esther, were there at the wharves to greet Jean and Clifford as they disembarked. They helped the young couple through customs. When they put the bags on the bench for the customs officer to check, he looked up and said, "Hello Mr Hand, how are you? What brings you here?" When he learned that Clifford and Jean were the Hand's friends, he waived them through with a wink and a smile. "Oh, okay, off you go!" Jean couldn't believe it, but Clifford was immediately reminded of his RAF days and knew he had made the right choice.

Because they took the long road home so the English couple could see the sights, the party did not approach Wonthaggi until dusk. As they drove through Dalyston, George told them that this was the last town before Wonthaggi. Jean was aghast. "Is this what they call a town?" she thought. It only had one pub and one shop. They couldn't see how Dalyston could be called a town. In fact, it's size only served to prove to the young couple what they had already begun to think on the slow drive out from the wharf; that Australia was entirely empty. What must Wonthaggi be like?



*Mr
&
Mrs
Hand*

George Hand stopped the car at 21 Korumburra Road and guided everyone into the house. Their daughter had been left at home to get a beautiful tea ready for everyone. Finally, Clifford and Esther were shown their room, a beautiful bedroom with a double bed! They stayed for almost four months before they found a tiny house to move into not long before their son, Tony, was born. Mrs Hand became like a mother to Jean and George a father to Clifford.

Clifford had come to Australia with the offer of a job using the skills he had acquired in the Air force. It was at Essendon Airport. He had no idea how far away that was from Wonthaggi until he got on the train and six hours later found his way to the airport. When he got there, he found there was no accommodation for a wife and soon-to-arrive child. The only living quarters were single men's hostels. He remembered the warning his mother-in-law had given him about leaving Jean behind and he rejected the job offer.

Back in Wonthaggi, he thought he'd have to go down the mine. He went to have a look to see if he could stomach it since he knew what his father and brothers lived through. Compared to the mines in Northern England, he found the conditions in the State Coal Mine to be primitive and shocking. "They are like worms crawling around on their knees to get coal," he told Jean.

It seemed every one was looking out for this young couple. Mr Kiernan, who had the shop on Ludbrook's Corner, heard about Clifford's plight, understood the young man had a good head for numbers and offered him a job. Before long, Clifford got the small furniture business going and in March 1949, just before Tony was born, Mr Kiernan offered to sell the business to him. Clifford knew he could make a go of it, but he had no money to buy it.

From almost day one, Jean and Clifford had formed a very good friendship with Frank and Doreen Mollison. The two young couples saw each other regularly. Clifford told Frank about his dilemma. Without telling Clifford, Frank asked his father, who ran a building company, if he had any money to lend Cliff. "He really could make a go of it, Dad." The old man said 'no' but if Cliff was such a good risk maybe Frank could invest himself. £1000 is what he would need.

One night the Mollisons asked the Osbornes to tea. During the meal, Frank took £1000 out of his pocket and divided it into two piles of £500 on the table. He pointed to one pile and said to Clifford, "That money is yours and this money is mine. Together we are going to buy that shop." He had mortgaged his house to help his friend.

With Clifford's head for figures they did well, Cliff running the shop and Frank doing the deliveries on the weekend.

"In the meantime," Jean remembers, "we joined everything: Cliff in the RSL and I in the Anglican Church Auxiliary with Mrs Hand. Lots more."

In June, only four months after they had come to Wonthaggi, Jean gave birth to Tony. Mrs Hand went to see Jean in hospital and brought her a 'nice salmon salad' for her tea. Jean was surprised. Mrs Hand said, "They'll feed you at midday, but nothing at night. It's all organised: the ladies at the Auxiliary will make sure one of us visits you everyday and brings you your tea."

"Oh, that's lovely," said Jean. Lying-in after giving birth in 1949 lasts at least ten days. Ten meals they would be bringing her!

Mrs Hand had something else with her. She knew the Osbornes had no pram to push the baby in. So she said to her friends, "This young girl doesn't need any bits and bobs you might be knitting or a rattle you might be buying. She needs a pram, so put your money in this envelope and we'll give it to her." Mrs Hand gave Jean the envelope with enough money in it to buy a lovely pram. Jean was overwhelmed at the generosity.

Jean says, "When I came out of hospital, Mrs Hand was on my doorstep first thing. She said, 'I am not visiting; I've come to bath the baby. You have a shower, I'll dress him and have him ready for you.' She sat me down, handed Tony to me and went into the laundry, washed the nappies and hung them out. She did that for the first month I was home."

"Goodness! What a place Wonthaggi turned out to be. We had never been so welcome or treated with such kindness in our lives. We would stay here forever."

Looks like Clifford had made a good decision when he chose to come to Australia; and Jean was smart to marry him. But, the luckiest thing they did was come to Wonthaggi.

(This is the first of a two-part story.)