

## **PLOD ESSAY: A story of Wonthaggi** **by the man who opened the first business in Wonthaggi**

*Jim Glover, was a founder of our society and the father of Jill Miles, our current Senior Vice President. Jill recently found this fragment of memories amongst her father's papers. We think the man who wrote or told the story is Mr Cain, because we think Cain's was the first butcher shop on the coalfields. It is written in the vernacular of the day and gives us a sense of actually being in the past listening to a man tell a story.*

The first shaft was sunk in a flat that used to be a swamp in wintertime with ducks and snipe on it, so you have some idea how the teams got on. A good seam of coal was found at a depth of twelve feet and other shafts were much deeper.

It was a common sight to see bullock teams bogged up to the axles, sometimes twenty bullocks on one wagon.

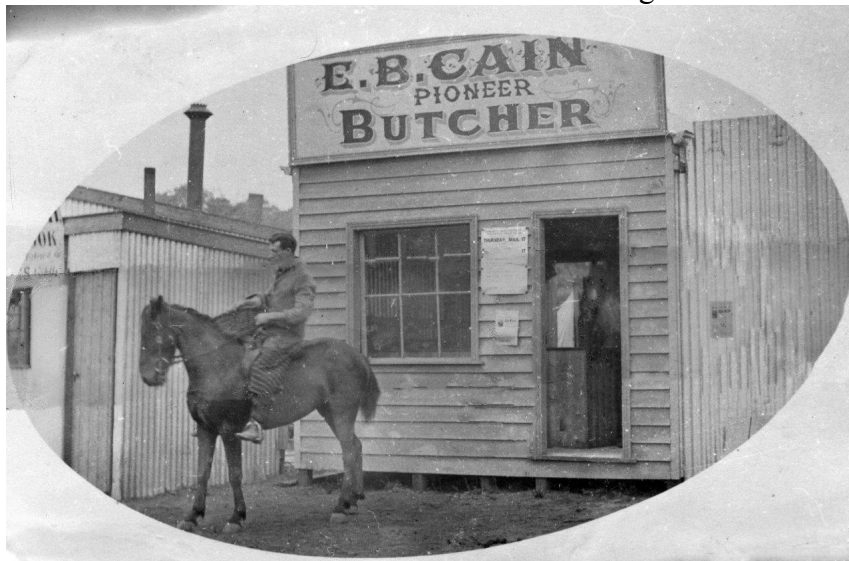
A team of four bullocks came in one day with a wagon with caterpillar wheels, the first to come to Wonthaggi. I remember the old teamsters looking at it and making a joke of it. They said, 'He will never get out.' So, he loaded up six tons of coal and went out without any trouble and laid his own road as he went. I can still see the look of the faces of the old bullock drivers. They could not believe it.

Then the tractor came in and carted to Inverloch before the Railway came. A coastal boat named *Ripple* took the coal to Melbourne. The wind was very strong and several vessels were wrecked around Cape Paterson as the coast there was very rough. Also it was very dangerous for fishing off the rocks. Several lives have been lost there.

At that time, no one knew where the town was to be so we all had our own ideas. You would buy a block anywhere thinking you were right.

I bought some in Hicksborough, but I was wrong.

I opened a butcher's shop in a tent after forty men arrived from some gold mining centre. They came to San Remo and had to come by coaches to Wonthaggi as there was no railway yet built. The early settlers had a bad time of it as most of the land was very poor except for a little on the Powlett River. The Mail Coach used to run from San Remo to Inverloch. These forty men arrived thinking there was a store or something for food and there was nothing at all.



I bought ten sheep from a local man and killed four of the to feed the men and I had no block so I chopped the sheep up on a big log. Then I had to get a shop built.

The next man to start a shop was Mr Jack Reynolds, a grocer from Moorabbin.

As men arrived the government gave them each a tent and the car-penters had to make frames for them and it was all formed in the streets just like a city. I have seen new arrivals go and get a frame for their tent and then they had to go to the depot for the tent. By the time they came back their frame had gone further up the street.

Our first Barber was a little Scotchman, but he had no shop. He did business in his tent. He had no chair so he lay his customers on his bed and shaved them for 6d. Now you pay 3/- and 4/6 for a haircut, which was 1/- then.

When the first beer licence was granted, you could buy less than two gallons at a time. The owner used to run around in a four-wheeled buggy and deliver to the tents jars of beer holding two gallons. He called regularly and took the empty ones away, leaving full

ones so the men were quite happy and contented. He called his wagon The Blue Pig and as an advertisement, he painted it blue and drove it with a blue harness. He also wore a blue hat and blue boots. He did well until more licences were granted.

The first restaurant opened next to me in a big canvas building. For a while they cooked everything outside in an oven built into the ground and were kept busy as more men kept arriving every day.

I saw the first funeral, which was a little girl [named Joy Brown] and the men carried her to the cemetery and everyone marched behind.

When the railway was being built, things got very busy after the site for the new town was selected by the government. We all got notice to move from the tents into town. There was a wild rush to buy blocks for shop-sites and dwellings. It was equal to a gold rush. Some blocks were sold at high prices. Then the fun commenced as teams tried to cart in timber for buildings. The whole place was just a big bog of mud and water.

One enterprising man had built a big tin place when we were still in the tents. Underneath was a dance room and upstairs was beds for men. Just a ladder up the wall like a stable, but he was kept busy. When we received notice to move, he moved two feet per day with a 'forest devil'. There were plenty of trees and stumps to hook onto. He had the authorities beaten until he was ready.

The first Club on the new town site was a big Marquee, which was started by two

brothers named Smith and the first billiard table was carted there by bullock team. The canvas building was used also as a stadium and some very good fights took place there.

Many houses were moved onto the house blocks in Wonthaggi from Outtrim as it was in decline, also from Jumbunna. Many miners moved their homes with bullock teams after they got work in Wonthaggi.

So before the railway was built to get to Wonthaggi from Melbourne, you got a train to Stony Point and then took a boat to San Remo then went by coach for twelve miles through Kilcunda and Dalyston. Dalyston was named after a few families (early settlers) named Daly and when Wonthaggi opened it made the place very valuable and the old settlers did well, as there was a good demand for mutton, lamb, beef and vegetables of all kinds and fruit, which did well there, too. So the pioneers and their families got a good turn up.

Well, I hope some of my old friends happen to read this and I would be very pleased to meet any of them if they are in Melbourne or I would like a letter from any of my old friends.

*We do not know when the man who opened the first shop in Wonthaggi wrote this or if his friends ever read it. We hope they did and that they sent him some letters thanking him for the memories.*



***Business side of Collins Street, Powlett Camp.  
Photo taken May 1910; Tent Town abolished in June of that year.***