
From Coffins to Cars

The block of land which became 44 Lyle Street, has played an interesting and varied role in the commercial history of Warracknabeal. The following account provides some insights into the businesses which have operated on this block since it was first taken up in 1874.

The Gardiner Family: Builders and Undertakers

A large allotment on the north side of Lyle Street, between Jamouneau and Scott Streets, has been associated with the Gardiner family since 1874. **William Gardiner** came to Warracknabeal with his family from Port Fairy (at that time called Belfast) in 1873. It is believed that he bought the allotment the following year, and built a residence on it.

Gardiner had a colourful history, arriving in Australia in 1849, and working in Melbourne, Geelong and the Victorian Goldfields. After several years he went gold seeking in New Zealand, where he was "pressed into the late Queen's service (to fight the Maoris) and censured for sending reports to the Melbourne papers concerning the Wanganui outbreak among the Maories (sic), and where he was wounded".

Returning to Victoria Gardiner lived in Hamilton and Port Fairy, working as a reporter with the *Belfast Gazette*; and it was in that capacity that he came to the Wimmera to report on its suitability for settlement. Gardiner was so impressed that he decided to settle in Warracknabeal. It is interesting to note that the Gardiner family was one of a number of families, all members of the Wesleyan faith from Port Fairy, who settled in the Warracknabeal district at that time!

Gardiner made a considerable contribution to the town's development as a builder and bricklayer. He built, or supervised the building of, most of the principal brick buildings erected in the town during his working life. These included the State School, Mechanics Institute, Wesleyan (Methodist) and Presbyterian Churches, police station and at least three hotels. For some of these projects Gardiner worked in partnership with other contractors: with the Wesleyan Church, for example, he worked with Joseph Jamouneau, a carpenter and fellow Wesleyan; for the Presbyterian Church, he worked with a Mr Collett.

Gardiner was a prominent townsman. It was through his influence that the Warracknabeal Cemetery was gazetted in 1875, the *Warracknabeal Herald* established in 1885 and the first Dimboola Road bridge erected. He was sexton of the cemetery from 1875 until his death in 1904, a member and office-bearer of the Warracknabeal Brass Band, correspondent for the *Horsham Times* and town pound keeper. Gardiner and his wife Elizabeth helped pioneer the Wesleyan cause in the town. After Elizabeth's death in 1917 a beautiful stained glass window was erected in their honour in the town's second Methodist Church, which had been opened in 1909; this window was destroyed in 1986 when the then Uniting Church was burned down.

William's son, **Thomas Edward Gardiner** came to Warracknabeal as a child, and lived all his life on the corner of Scott and Lyle Streets. *Prosperous and Progressive Warracknabeal* (1910) provides details of his life:

"On passing from youth he became a builder, and a builder he remains. Some of the principal buildings in the town and district are a monument to his skill. His reputation as a good and honest builder has travelled far throughout the district, and, even with a staff of thirty men, he finds a difficulty in meeting all his orders. He has just completed a (1000 pounds) addition to Mrs. Schultze's hotel, away up in Hopetoun, and now he is putting the finishing touches to

Mr Farquhar M'Rae's magnificent private house in Wallup, which is said to be the finest house in the Wimmera. In between he is kept busy erecting business and private places in the town and district."

Gardiner also built a number of commercial buildings in the town, including Mercer's garage; and in all probability, he built the large, partly two-storied corrugated iron shed at the rear of his property, as a workshop and storage area for his building business. This building later became the workshop of B & S Schubert's motor garage at 44 Lyle Street. From all accounts, it would appear that Gardiner's building business finally ceased some time before 1916.

In May 1907 Gardiner commenced an undertaking business which he purchased from Daniel Jamouneau. This business had been started by Joseph Jamouneau in the 1870's and was continued by his son Daniel after Joseph died in 1893. It would appear that Jamouneau's premises was situated on the site of Gardiner's present mortuary, the corner of Lyle and Jamouneau Streets; and it was through this purchase that Tom Gardiner secured the whole Lyle Street frontage between Scott and Jamouneau Streets. Daniel Jamouneau worked for Gardiner in the undertaking business after the sale. Edward Amor, a partner of Daniel Jamouneau after he took over his father's business in 1893, also advertised in the *Warracknabeal Herald* in May 1907 that he had "decided to start business again as an undertaker in premises situated at the corner of Lyle and Jamouneau Streets". Research has not been able explain if there was any relationship between Amor's and Gardiner's businesses, or if Amor was operating out of Jamouneau's old premises. At any rate, no reference to Amor's undertaking business can be found after 1907.

Gardiner built a new mortuary beside his house, facing onto Scott Street, in 1907 (the year that it is believed he renovated his substantial residence on the corner). The mortuary building still survives at 168 Scott Street, but without its attractive facade. *Prosperous and Progressive Warracknabeal* records that Gardiner conducted his undertaking business "with the good order and thoroughness characteristic of him. All the coffins are made on the premises, and, though it is difficult to enthuse over a coffin, it must be admitted that they are splendid specimens of workmanship." It is thought that one of Gardiner's employees, Charlie Wilson, worked for many years making coffins upstairs in the corrugated iron workshop. After 1914, Gardiner also shared this building with Griffiths' windmill factory (see below). When the windmill factory closed, George Griffiths worked for Gardiner as he had done previously part-time, building coffins and assisting with funerals. Coffins were built locally by Gardiner's staff until the second world war. Gardiner was an agent for Robson and Gray, the Stawell monumental masons, from 1907.

Like his father, Tom Gardiner was a prominent townsman. He was active in the Methodist Church and the temperance movement, and was a member of the Rechabite and Masonic Lodges. He succeeded his father as sexton of the cemetery and was a player and trustee of the Warracknabeal Brass Band. Gardiner was an active member of the Warracknabeal Football Club; he was President 1926 - 1935, club delegate to the Wimmera and Ballarat-Wimmera competitions, and President and Life Member of the Wimmera District League.

Gardiner helped pioneer the advent of movie pictures in the town. Initially it is believed he showed pictures in a big marquee at the local Agricultural and Pastoral Society show, the projector powered by a car. In 1911 he began showing films in the Temperance Hall in Devereux Street, forming the Melba Picture Company. The *Warracknabeal Herald* announced in July 1911: "Melba Picture Coy. The first entertainment on Tuesday by the above Company who are announced to show every week in Warracknabeal was given at the Temperance Hall. The outside of the Hall was brilliantly illuminated by means of electric light, the name of the Company, surmounted by a crown, presented an attractive appearance. On Wednesday night the Company was greeted by a crowded house in Horsham, picture shown of the Coronation Pageant."

In 1912 Gardiner purchased the Temperance Hall and rebuilt it as Melba Theatre. The following year he built an open air facility beside the theatre, seating 2000, and erected a skating rink

inside, initiating skating carnivals and other entertainments throughout the district. In 1913 also he purchased "the plant of the Continental Picture Co. in St. Kilda Rd."; while at considerable expense in 1914 Melba Picture Company introduced talking movies - "singing pictures: The Vivaphone" - to the town. By then Melba Pictures was an accepted part of the entertainment scene in Warracknabeal, and pictures were shown twice weekly until years after the owner's death. Gardiner was a generous benefactor of many town institutions and enterprises, often donating proceeds from his entertainments to worthy causes such as the Warracknabeal and District Hospital, Warracknabeal State School and Anzac Park.

But it is as a result of his involvement with the Warracknabeal Fire Brigade, that a further interesting chapter in the history of 44 Lyle Street was written.

Gardiner-Aussie Patent Fire Fighter Factory

Tom Gardiner was a member of the Warracknabeal Fire Brigade from 1897, serving in many positions including Captain from 1922 until his death in 1935. It was in that position that he began experimenting with a fire fighting pump mounted on a "T" model Ford chassis. Gardiner had first got the idea at a fire demonstration in Werribee; and used his pump fighting local grass and haystack fires with water from dams.

In 1923 these experiments came to the notice of the Country Fire Brigade Board; the eventual acceptance of Gardiner's pump by the Board is described in *Warracknabeal Urban Fire Brigade 1891 - 1991*:

"In March 1924, at the State demonstrations held in Geelong, the pump was tested under adverse conditions and came through with promising results. The Board asked that Gardiner leave the pump at Maryborough where it would be submitted to the most exhaustive tests possible. It was felt that with extra power the Gardiner pump ought to be adequate for the needs of most country towns.

"Gardiner had transformed the large shed at the rear of his house into a workshop. There, with his son William, Les Winsall and Charlie Wilson, he worked on modifications to the pump. A friction drive set up behind the gearbox was fitted to a shaft connected to the pump which was on the back of the truck. The chain drive wasn't reliable, as it stretched over time, as well as being noisy. Even so, it gave 60 to 70 pounds gauge pressure to the pump from a canvas tank. Gardiner worked on the idea of a pump gearbox to be fitted to the power take-off just behind the truck gearbox, and had overhead valves put in the engine to give more power. Tests proved these changes successful.

"The C.F.B.B. sent Jack Trengrove, then Head Stationkeeper at Bendigo and the current State ladder champion, to trial the new pump. The machine was given a thorough test by recording pressures obtained from all sources of still water and town supply. Trengrove's expert opinion was forwarded to the Board who decided to combine their annual meeting in 1926 with a visit to Warracknabeal to view the Gardiner pump themselves.

"At a banquet that night C.F.B.B. President, William Wallace announced that the Board had accepted the Gardiner pump, mounted on a Dodge or Reo chassis, as being the most suitable for their requirements. Captain Gardiner was congratulated on his achievement and commissioned to assemble the pumps in Warracknabeal."

Gardiner's hard work, and many trips to Melbourne to purchase parts for modifications, had paid off; thus was born the Gardiner-Aussie Patent Fire Fighter which brought Gardiner considerable prominence throughout Australia, and which was "pronounced one of the greatest fire fighting implements ever invented"!

The pumps, made to Gardiner's design, along with the gearbox and fittings were manufactured at Mann Brothers' foundry in Ballarat. Gardiner purchased the chassis in Melbourne, and they would be fitted with the pumps at Mann's, en route to Warracknabeal.

Gardiner employed up to 20 men, including Jack Trengrove who became his chief mechanic, at his Warracknabeal factory, assembling the whole fire fighting units and building the bodywork over the pumps. The units were designed to seat four men on either side, above outward opening bays which housed 500 feet of flaked fire fighting hose. Pumps for smaller towns were fitted on Ford chassis; a Graham (Dodge) chassis was used for larger centres while a Reo chassis was used for cities such as Geelong and Ballarat. On completion the units were sent by rail to their destinations.

Gardiner was instrumental in having a new fire station built in Warracknabeal in 1929. It is believed that the original fire brigade hall was moved to his Lyle Street premises where it served as part of the Gardiner-Aussie factory. Tom Gardiner went on to serve on the Country Fire Brigade Board, and was known to most brigades in the state because of his invention and his continuous involvement in fire brigade demonstrations for many years.

In all, 55 Gardiner-Aussie Fire Fighters were built in the Lyle Street factory, and in their heyday, they were used by many brigades in Victoria and interstate. Three or four pumps even went to Western Australia! The Warracknabeal Fire Brigade was presented with a Gardiner-Aussie pump in 1928 which gave sterling service for many years. Thirty-nine years later, in January 1967, the Warracknabeal Brigade purchased a fire truck on which was mounted a Gardiner-Aussie pump assembled in Warracknabeal in 1925. Built on a 1932 Dodge, the unit was obtained from the Skipton Rural Fire Brigade for \$200. Believed to be one of the last Gardiner-Aussie pumps in working order in the country, it proved to be of great interest at the Warracknabeal Centenary celebrations in April 1967.

When Griffiths' windmill factory closed down in the early 1930's, Gardiner renovated the factory and the corrugated iron building for continued use by both his undertaking and pump assembly businesses. But the days of the Gardiner-Aussie Fire Fighter factory were also numbered. After Tom Gardiner's death in 1935 the Country Fire Authority took over the workshop, and transferred production to Castlemaine later that year.

Apart from the obvious historical links, a warm personal relationship developed between B. and S. Schubert and three generations of the Gardiner family involved in the company, W. B. Gardiner and Son, Funeral Directors.

William B Gardiner took over the undertaking business from his father Thomas, and continued operating from the Scott Street mortuary. In the mid-1940's, possibly after the original Gardiner property was sold or sub-divided, Bill Gardiner built the present mortuary on the corner of Lyle and Jamouneau Streets, on Jamouneau's original block and abutting the western boundary of Gardiner's original block, and what became Schubert's property. The mortuary was built in two stages, the front parlour section first, then later the residence at the rear.

During Schubert's early years in Lyle Street, William Gardiner would often drive to Melbourne to purchase coffins; and he would frequently offer to pick up spare parts in the city for Schuberts. On returning to Warracknabeal, he would pull his truck into Schubert's yard and unload the neatly packed spare parts from inside the coffins! The same arrangement took place with rail deliveries: Schubert's spare parts would sometimes travel to Warracknabeal packed carefully inside caskets consigned to Gardiners!

Bill Rose recalls the afternoon when two elderly men came up to him working in Schubert's office and asked how long it would take to bury their brother. Bill hastily directed them to Gardiner's mortuary next door!

Mrs Cheryl Gardiner (the wife of John Gardiner, William's grandson) worked in Schubert's office from October 1989 until after the business closed to the public in January 1994.

Griffiths' Windmill Factory

Griffiths' windmill factory was established in Warracknabeal in 1906, by **Thomas Griffiths**. Research has shown that Griffiths was a brother of William Gardiner's wife, and it is probable that he rented the block of land, 44 Lyle Street, Warracknabeal, from his nephew, Tom Gardiner.

Most of Griffiths' life was spent in Port Fairy (originally called Belfast) where he landed at the age of nine years in 1856. For many years he was manager of the gas works at Port Fairy, and it was during his residence there that he invented a windmill, and subsequently began manufacturing and installing them. It would appear that Griffiths' parents and siblings moved to the Warracknabeal district in about 1876, where Griffiths senior took up land at Cannum.

In April 1906 an announcement in *The Warracknabeal Herald* informed the public that Thomas Griffiths, "the well-known Windmill maker" of Port Fairy, was "at present in the district, erecting several of his well-known Windmills. Anyone wanting a really first class Mill at a Moderate Price, could not do better than inspect this mill before purchasing one. Everything supplied, including Mill Tank, Pump, Piping, Troughs, Etc., and erected under Mr Griffiths' personal supervision. Mill and Steel Stand complete from 10 (pounds)". The advertisement noted that information was available from Griffiths' agents, Mr J. C. Devereux, "Leura", Warracknabeal and Mr J. McLeod, Galaquil, or from "Thos. Griffiths, care T. Gardiner, where the mill can be seen working. Mr Griffiths' Mills may also be inspected working at the following places:-

Mr William Fenton, Warracknabeal,
Mr George Devereux, Warracknabeal,
Mr John Gould, Warracknabeal,
Allan's Timber Yard, Beulah,
Mr Constable, Yellam Plains,
Mr J. C. Devereux, "Leura", Warracknabeal,
Mr J. McLeod, Galaquil,
Mr Crafter, Kewell N,
Mr G. Payne, Brim,
Mr Milbourne, Brim
Mr S. Hutchinson, Warracknabeal."

Thomas Griffiths operated his windmill business from Gardiner's large shed until about 1910 when a new brick premises, most probably built by Tom Gardiner, was erected on the Lyle Street land. It was this building which, 40 years later, became the showroom and offices of B & S Schubert, motor garage. It is interesting to note that the tiled front step bearing Griffiths' name was carefully removed when the building was demolished in 1963, but it has since unfortunately disappeared.

Prosperous and Progressive Warracknabeal (1910) expounded the virtues of Griffiths' Windmills which had "won such fame throughout the Wimmera District" and also noted that Thomas Griffiths had "acquired a great local reputation for his acetylene gas installations...and general plumbing works". It would appear that Gardiner's building and undertaking business operated from the corrugated iron shed at the rear of Griffiths' factory, throughout the whole of its existence.

Thomas Griffiths lived in a small cottage beside his factory, in Lyle Street, and it is possible that there were other small dwellings there also. After Griffiths died in 1914 it appears that one of his sons, Enoch John Griffiths, started another windmill business, Griffiths and Dawe, in Scott Street, Warracknabeal, opposite McCombe's Hotel. Griffiths junior had moved from Port Fairy where he had been an undertaker, and windmill manufacturer for 15 years, to set up his business. It is

unknown if he manufactured windmills to his father's design, or if he designed his own; similarly, there are no records to indicate how long his business in Warracknabeal survived.

Thomas Griffiths' original business in Lyle Street was taken over by another son, **Richard George Griffiths**, who purchased the windmill patterns from his father's estate. George Griffiths converted the brick premises into his residence, and the Griffiths manufacturing works was transferred to Gardiner's building at the rear. Griffiths occupied the ground floor while, upstairs, Gardiner's coffins were made. Later, from the mid 1920's, Griffiths also shared this building and the yard with the men assembling the famous Gardiner-Aussie fire-fighting pumps. George Griffiths and his family lived in the factory building until 1924 when they moved to a new residence in Jamouneau Street. After that, Tom Gardiner's daughter and her husband lived in the factory.

William Henry Hager came to Warracknabeal in 1916 and spent eight years with Griffiths, travelling widely for the company. He later established a plumbing business of his own, and eventually left the town in the early 1930's. In an interview with the author during the 1967 Warracknabeal Centenary, he recalled that Griffiths' employees would travel throughout the district to install windmills, tanks, horse troughs and plumbing. When it was wet they were often unable to get home because of the muddy conditions! Mr Hager remembered that a Mr Cootes, a miner from Western Australia, put down six or seven wells along the Yarriambiack Creek; he was the only person able to beat the sand drifts, and all the wells were fitted with Griffiths windmills. A further 16 bores were also sunk in the district and these, too, boasted windmills supplied by Griffiths. Mr Hager also recalled that during the end of his time with Griffiths he assisted Tom Gardiner to develop the Gardiner-Aussie pumps.

Advertisements in the *Warracknabeal Herald* in the 1920's listed a large range of products made by Griffiths, including a geared windmill, and an even larger range for which the company was an agent. In time, when the design of the famous windmill became dated, George Griffiths took on an agency for a new oil windmill, rather than manufacture a newer model locally. Mr Hager believed that that decision marked the beginning of the end for the company, and the factory closed some time after 1932, during the Depression. Apart from his plumbing business, George Griffiths had also worked part-time for Tom Gardiner for many years. This continued after his factory closed; until he moved to Melbourne in 1941 Griffiths continued to assist both Tom Gardiner and later his son Bill, with their undertaking business.

McLean's Butchers Shop

Few details survive of the butcher's shop which operated in Griffiths windmill factory building for a few years from the late 1930's or early 1940's. It is believed to have been started by Graetz, before being run by Arch and Col McLean. It is also thought that Bill Thompson worked there as a butcher for a period.

The butcher's shop had been closed for several years before Schuberts moved to 44 Lyle street in 1947. As part of Schubert's renovation of the building before moving in, the old refrigerated cool room, hanging racks and meat preparation areas had to be removed.

By the mid 1940's, if not earlier, the property at 44 Lyle Street passed into the ownership of W. (Bill) Colliver of Warracknabeal. Colliver was an accountant who managed McDonald's Garage, before taking up a grazing property at Edenhope. It is possible that Colliver bought the property from the Gardiner family and, in turn, rented it to the men operating the butcher's shop. In all events, both the brick building and the workshop at the rear were vacant for some years before Schuberts occupied them. During this period Warracknabeal storekeeper, John McDonald Page, stored oats in the workshop building.
