



City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewee: Dorothy “Dot” Elsum

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historian

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Please note that the interviewee has reviewed this transcript. Words in italics have been added at the request of the interviewee. Only material in this final transcript may be cited or used for publication or exhibition.

Family background

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SR: We're going to start off with your own biographical information, your family.

Firstly, would you be so kind as to introduce yourself?

DE: Dorothy, known as Dot, Elsum.

SR: What's your connection to the C H Anderson Bakehouse?

DE: I remember living there as a little girl with my mum and dad and my sister.

SR: Is there an earliest memory that you can tie back to South Melbourne?

DE: My earliest memory is the bakehouse, I'd have been about six at the time. When you get old you really do remember when you were very young for some reason or other. I remember it because I used to help Mum in the shop actually, being more of a nuisance. Because we sold sweeties I'd come in on the pretext of helping Mum and I'd have a sweet you see, so that was that. I remember the bakehouse mainly as so big, but when I saw it again at the tender age of 92 it was very small.

SR: I've got some questions later that are about the actual bakehouse itself. Just now, could you say for me where and when you were born?

DE: Yes well I was born in Carlton in 1924.

SR: Tell me a little bit about your immediate family. You've got a sister?

DE: Yes, Phyllis Gloria.

SR: When was she born?

DE: 1917.

SR: Do you know when you moved to South Melbourne, how old you were?

DE: I would be about four to six I suppose.

SR: Do you know where you lived before then?

DE: Yes I do. As a matter of fact I lived near my aunt's bakehouse in Preston in Wood Street.

02:45

SR: Was this is an Anderson aunt?

DE: Yes she was Eliza Anderson. She married a Callender and that became Callender's Bakery for many, many years, I think up until the time ... died, and then that was sold to Tip Top Bakeries. That's all I can tell you about that side of the family.

SR: Was the reason you were living there because your dad was helping in that bakehouse?

DE: As the story goes my dad bought the bakehouse for my aunt because she was widowed or something - she naturally paid for it but he negotiated everything for her - and he did work there. That's how we came to be living so close in Wood Street; the bakehouse was on the corner of Wood Street and Plenty Road, that's from memory.

SR: You had a stepbrother as well?

DE: Yes my father was married twice and he was widowed. Plant Jnr., my stepbrother, didn't have anything to do with the bakery. He was an optician and had his own business in Pitt Street, Sydney.

SR: Tell me your mother's name and if you remember her date of birth.

DE: No, I haven't got it written down - I can give it to you - she was a lot younger than my dad. Her name was Lydia Marian Genders. [?] She always got 'Lil' though.

SR: And your dad's full name?

DE: Plant Anderson.

SR: Do you know his year of birth?

DE: I've written it down.

05:20

SR: [pause] I've got a lovely document here, a family tree, that's got Plant Anderson born

1861, Ashby, Geelong, and Lydia Marian Genders born in 1879 in Brisbane. Tell me what you know about how your parents met.

DE: Dad was a bread carter at the time in South Melbourne; my mother was divorced, Dad was a widower though as I told you. He used to just deliver bread, you know. He had a very, very nice personality, as I go into his life you may find out. I don't know, he got on very well with my grandma (laughs) then he started taking the daughter out. That's how they met, through him delivering bread, a bread carter.

SR: Do you know who he carted bread for?

DE: His family, the Andersons. That's all I'd know about it because they were all in...

SR: So he delivered bread to grandmother Genders?

DE: Yes.

SR: **Got along well with her, and then started seeing Lydia?**

DE: So the story goes.

SR: **What was the age difference between them?**

DE: You've got it, it'd be underneath Dad.

SR: **We've got 1861, 1879, so it's nearly 20 years.**

DE: Yes, a lot of difference. They were married for 25 years when Dad died. It was, what I would call as a child into an adult, a very, very loving relationship.

07:34

SR: **Did you get along well with your sister?**

DE: Yes, my sister and I got on extremely - we did very well - until I grew up, because there was seven years' difference between us and she treated me like a little doll. Then I became a very tall person. (laughs) Apart from that we had - well Phyl was married and had started a family and I was still with Mum after Dad died - we both had different ideas of life.

SR: **Did Phyl spend much time in the bakehouse?**

DE: She did but that was not in South Melbourne, that's when we had the bakehouse in North Melbourne.

SR: **After your mum got sick?**

DE: My mum was cleaning the copper and apparently it was so dirty she got verdigris poisoning. Apparently she must have scratched herself on each arm in the cleansing of it. She had to have both of us in the shop, especially my sister being seven years older. I just used to sort of sweep the floor or do something - make a nuisance of myself.

SR: **Does Phyl remember much about C.H. Anderson Bakehouse? Did you ever talk much about what she remembered?**

DE: No, Phyl was not interested as far as I can gather.

SR: **Let's move sideways to the Andersons and what you know about them. What do you know of why they came to Australia and where from?**

DE: They came from Ireland, that was the Plantagenet side, grandfather, and as far as I know came to a better land. I don't know - was the famine at that time?

SR: **When did they come? Tell me about the patriarch, Plantagenet.**

DE: I never met him.

10:00

SR: **What do you know of him? What were told about him - anything?**

DE: Well not a lot except that - I'm now digressing away from South Melbourne - they lived in Korumburra. Grandad paid - it sounds silly today - sixpence each for the children to go to school; it was a one master apparently, just a little schoolhouse. From what I gather Grandad was the baker there and Dad helped him in the shop or the bakehouse. But I know nothing at all about Grandad.

SR: **I've got here on this wonderful family tree "Plantagenet Anderson born in 1827 Ireland, and died 1883, Emerald Hill, Victoria."**

DE: Obviously they travelled about a bit didn't they.

SR: **Was he a baker in Ireland?**

DE: No idea, but it wouldn't surprise me.

SR: **But by the time you first hear of him it's Korumburra and he's got a bakehouse up there.**

DE: Yes. All I know about it is he had a lot of children, he and his wife. I know a lot about the subsequent children, I met quite a few of them.

SR: **His wife - we don't have her name do we?**

DE: No we don't actually. I have it in the family tree.

SR: **We do, sorry, Elizabeth Jane Thomas Pearson.**

DE: Is that her?

SR: **I think so - yes it is.**

DE: And then you'd have Plant Jnr. born.

SR: **She was born in 1834 in England and she died in South Melbourne in 1911.**

DE: Mum and Dad were married five years before they had Phyl so they'd be married in 1912. It's a very quick romance, wasn't it?

SR: **This is Plantagenet, this is your grandfather and his wife.**

DE: Mm.

12:17

SR: **How many children did Plantagenet and Elizabeth have?**

DE: My father always said 15 but here it says only 11. (laughs)

SR: **It looks like from here one came with them on the journey and died at sea.**

DE: Died at sea so obviously she'd be buried at sea. ... that all pertains to the Anderson family. I knew Aunty Eliza, I knew her well because of the bakehouse in Preston, and Aunty Maria, and I knew an Uncle Jack, and I knew Uncle George.

SR: **So the key Andersons to our South Melbourne story are Charles Harry and your father - Charles Henry Anderson who C H Bakehouse was named.**

DE: That's right.

SR: **He was born in 1855 in Ashby, Geelong?**

DE: Yes.

SR: **And then we've got several siblings, and then Plant, your father, so Plant Jnr, born in 1861 in Ashby. So they're the two critical players.**

DE: Yes Dad and Uncle Harry. I know nothing about him because he died fairly early in the piece.

SR: **Way before you were born.**

DE: Yes way before.

SR: **Do you remember being told anything about him?**

DE: No. I always thought it was Grandad's business until my nephew Paul did the family tree. He said, "No Aunty, it's your uncle's business," which surprised me greatly.

14:17

SR: **Why did you think it was your grandfather?**

DE: I just automatically thought that because it was so old. Because it obviously - as you'll judge by the photos - it was one design and then became another design within a very short time I should image. So it was almost as though maybe Uncle Harry bought the business - I don't know, I truly don't. See I'm not much use to you really because I'm the last of the siblings.

SR: **What do you remember about your dad, Plant?**

DE: Oh my father. He was a wonderful dancer to start with. As the story goes, in Bourke Street, Melbourne we had a Tivoli Theatre and it was - I don't know - told dirty jokes of the day and that - it was an affordable type of place. Dad was in a thing called the Black and White Minstrels doing tap-dancing and that, along with a fellow that practically ran 3DB in the early days, Charlie Ford, whom I met and knew him quite well through my father. From then on I suppose Dad married, or whatever. I don't know too much about it except that he kept dancing to the day he died, he was really good.

SR: **Do you know anything about his education or his schooling?**

DE: Yes sixpence a week at Korumburra. (laughs)

SR: **Do you know where he learnt his trade?**

DE: Well I just assume, because Grandad obviously had a type of business or something in Korumburra, that Dad just learned, that's how you did it those days.