



## City of Port Phillip Living Heritage Project

Edited transcript – Roger Backway

Interviewee: Roger Backway [RB]

Interviewer: Sarah Rood, Way Back When Consulting Historians [SR]

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## Social change

**SR: How did you see the character of the area change over time? Do you have any reflections on that? You were basically born there.**

**RB:** Yes, basically born there, and grew up, and to us it was a family area and it supported families going to the beach every weekend together. As the cars came into vogue, people were able to afford cars, all of a sudden there weren't so many at the beach, they were going to other places. Of course, my father never had a car early on but he could borrow my grandmother's car, and of course we started doing the same thing. So all of a sudden the area started to grow apart and it would be sometimes weeks before you saw some of the people again, and people change in that time. And we were all growing up and we wanted different things. In Tiuna Grove especially as the bigger houses - and it happened all over Elwood - the bigger houses and the rental accommodation being built brought in a different type of person; transients, young couples without children that were just there to work, there was nobody there for the whole of the day, they only slept there at night and at the weekends most of the time, they were away working somewhere else. The area changed considerably in that 1960s period, considerably. That's why the shopping centres all went downhill because it was a different lot of people.

**SR: How do you feel about the area now? Before I ask you that, were there any other turning points that looking back you can go it changed then.**

**RB:** I already said that, it changed again when some of the rental accommodation got married together and turned into own your own properties, and that was another change. And then the most recent changes over the last ten years has been the push to - well Ormond Road changed again with the advent of outdoor dining and coffee shops which brought a lot of different people in. Then they started building bigger blocks of units. In Ormond Road for instance, just over the road, they pulled the Elwood RSL down. The Elwood RSL was a favourite meeting spot for a long, long time, being developed by RSL with Elwood money, they'd got all their money from Elwood people, members in the club. It was a social club for somewhere to go, there were bands there on Sunday afternoon, a bistro and what have you, a snooker club there.

That all closed down through bad management and the Elwood people got nothing back for it, it all went to Anzac House. Anzac House sold it off for \$4.1 million and Elwood got nothing out of that other than what they've got now which is a giant block of 30-odd units with a shop out the front. And the rubbish truck comes to pick up the rubbish and it has to stop in the middle of Pine Avenue because there's nowhere for it to park, which is pretty poor management. That was right opposite our house.

1:07:26

In the next block they pulled down four houses and they built a large block of flats there with 20 or 30 units in it which is still laying vacant. It was finished last year and nobody can move in because there's something wrong with the cladding and it's empty. Not very good management. The next block they pulled down another three old lovely Edwardian bungalows and built another 30-odd units there. So in that little area which encompassed me in the middle, which is only less than half a kilometre, there's 100 units gone in there. Now on Saturday mornings everybody wants to go and have a coffee, there's nowhere to park. But that's the way it is.

That's why we moved out. And that was sad. I'd lived in that house for 52 years and I had a gigantic collection of all nice things in there which was my life, stuff like that. *[Roger indicates he pointed at part of his antique bottle collection.]* That was a sad thing. And our house had deteriorated somewhat too and needed a fair bit of money spent on it, and that was another thing. That was a sad time to have to shift out of Elwood where I'd lived for 70-something years with a lot of memories; most of them good and some of them not so good. That's just one street and that's going on all over Elwood, and that's a shame, but it's government policy and somebody's got to live with it.

*[pause in recording]*

**SR:** ... Take it away, Tiuna Grove, we're going back in time.

**1:09:46**

**RB:** Back in time to Tiuna Grove. One of the nice things that used to happen in Elwood, in the Elwood foreshore car park at the Head Street end, the Elwood RSL used to erect a huge big tent, like a big circus tent, at Christmas time, around Christmas time. They used to run a game called housie-housie which is modern day bingo. I was too young to participate in it but I used to enjoy going down there at the weekends very early on Saturday morning and early on Sunday morning to go and pick up all the coins that had been dropped the previous night. Because a threepence and a sixpence in those days was a good find. That was a way of getting a bit of extra pocket money. My mother could never work out why my short trousers were wearing out so quickly on the backside, because one of the nice things to do was to climb up the tent to the very top on the outside and slide down the canvas on the outside, which of course put a sheen on the backside of my pants. *[laughs]*

**SR:** It seems to me that a lot of your reflections of yourself and your peers as children, you were pushing the boundaries quite a lot. You were nicking food, and nicking palings, and doing kind of mischievous things. Was it just the thing that was done?

**RB:** No, it was a necessity to do these things. We'd come home from school at whatever time - half past three, four o'clock - and dinner wasn't until five thirty when my father came home. There was no extra food to have, there was no afternoon tea. So if you were hungry, and you often were, you'd run up and down the back lanes looking for the fruit hanging over the fences that you had access to. Right through the summer months from before Christmas when the apricots came out to the end of May I guess when there was still a few grapes around, and this helped. All of the other things like getting the palings off the fences or --- the plane trees in the streets were all pruned a different way to they are now, they used to prune them right back to their main stumps and the branches would grow straight up which made long, straight sticks when they were pruned through winter. They were all taken down and burnt down on the little Head Street tip down there just off the beach. We used to go and get all these sticks and straighten them up and we could make spears out of them and bows

and arrows that we could theoretically shoot one another with but we were very inaccurate. But it was a necessity to do that, there wasn't a toy shop, there wasn't money to go to a toy shop. It was very different to what it is today.

1:23:25

**SR: Is there anything else you wanted to add before we close off? It's been a fantastic series of interviews.**

**RB:** You want something personal?

**SR: Up to you. I'm happy just to end or if you wanted to add something personal feel free, it's completely up to you.**

**RB:** I'm here through a set of circumstances. My family has been in Australia since 1841 and my great-great-grandfather came here as a convict for allegedly stealing a pair of trousers, which he said he didn't do. Of course he didn't do it, he couldn't have done it, it's my great-grandfather. He was sent to Tasmania and he did his time there, and he got his ticket of leave and he became a farmer just outside of Hobart. He met my great-great-grandmother there and they were married in the New Town church where she signed the marriage papers with a cross, she was totally illiterate. Somehow, and I'm not quite sure how, they found their way to Victoria and I believe they walked from Melbourne up to Maryborough where the gold rush was on. They went in as miners and they struck it lucky. It's not written down anywhere but we're surmising that they struck it lucky because there are later reports, and I have pictures, of their gold mine which was more than surface digging, it was a proper mine.

**SR: We talked about that last time.**

**RB:** Is it in there?

**SR: Yes. That's okay.**

**RB:** And they went on somehow to get the block of land where they lived, and they farmed that land on the outskirts of Maryborough. As they passed on and it went to the next generation, of which there were 13 of them - I'm not quite sure how they all lived there - the next generation turned it into a dairy farm. It was that generation that I was able to go up and stay up there and work on that farm.

So just the fact that I've been able to live what I reckon has been a pretty good life through the rights or wrongs of somebody stealing a pair of trousers. That man was a chimney-sweep, that was his profession, and his father before him was a water-man, which is my grandfather by three. A water-man was the man that rode customers across the Thames before all the bridges were built. Through contact with another man in England who was also called Roger Backway, he's my cousin seven times removed, on his computer he has a male line of Backways back to 1494. So the name of Backway has been around a lot. And on the west coast of England, the west coast of Devon, there is a Backway Cove, and we're not quite sure why. But they did own a lot of land in Devon. There's been people saying that they were pirates and they were smugglers and all this sort of thing but we've got no proof.

**SR: It's exciting though, you come from a long line of Backways.**

**RB:** A long line, yes.

**SR: Wonderful. Alright, we might call it a day and close off. Thank you very much, Roger.**

**1:27:57**