

## Historical Note

### *My Short Trouser Years*

*By Horace Hawker*

I lived the first five years of my life in a two-storied shop/house combination on the corner of Austin Street and Scarborough Terrace. I was the youngest of six children.

My story covers the period of short trouser years, dating from the year of my birth in 1921 until 1936. My father was a well-built man and traded in the grocery business for forty years. Always conventionally dressed, he wore a white shirt surmounted by a stiffly starched collar complete with a tie, dark trousers and black shoes. His over-garments were a full-length black bib apron plus a light-weight alpaca jacket of similar colour that concealed his heavy-duty policeman/fireman brand trouser braces. In those early days, such grocers were highly respected members of the community. Throughout the shop, foodstuffs, produce – bacon, cheeses, ham, biscuits, bread, soaps and spices etc – were mainly unpacked and exposed. Without refrigeration, the resultant pungency was persuasively inviting to the customers.

Groceries were delivered, upon request, to customers by horse and trap. A stable was attached to the shop and such matters as compatibility of functions and hygiene were given scant attention, either in practice or by law. I clearly remember how I liked to sit out on the street kerb under the shop verandah and watch the world go by. Sometimes it would coincide with my father loading groceries on to the trap. Then he would plonk his big shoe on the protruding foot-size metal step and heave himself up into the driving seat. With a flick of the reins in one hand and the crack of a small whip in the other, he was away flying, with the trap's two enormous iron-encircled wheels crunching their way along the gravel road.

Some days, at the finish of business, the horse would be put out to graze on the vast expanse of Mt Victoria. Early next morning, before school, it was my much older brother Sam's unenviable task to set out with a handful of bread crusts to track down the horse. Mission achieved, he would mount and ride it down to the stable, bareback.

On some occasions, early on a Sunday morning, my sisters would conspire to elect one of their number to sneak downstairs to pinch a couple of handfuls of biscuits from the shop and return to bed to share a pre-breakfast snack. In this particular instance, the lightly-clad tousle-haired perpetrator decided to go up market and clutched a generous helping of chocolate biscuits to her body. Alas, finally back at home base, nightie, body and sheets became covered with a glutinous mess of melted chocolate!

Come Guy Fawkes Day, shortly after dawn shouts echoed up from the street below:

Guy Fawkes guy  
Stick 'im up on high  
Stick 'im on a lamppost  
And there let 'im die  
A loaf of bread to choke 'im  
A bottle of beer to was it down  
And a jolly good fire to roast 'im.

We all dashed downstairs to the shop and emptied out the till of its pennies and half-pennies (this time with parent approval), then up to the balcony overlooking the shop verandah. From here, we tossed the coppers to the children down below beside their trolleys and barrows containing the straw-stuffed guys with grotesque face masks. That evening, I was taken up to the quarry at the top of Ellice Street to enjoy the fun, watching for the first time the thrill of a roaring bonfire with its sporadic flame bursts lighting up in turn the various groups of adults and children standing around. The dazzling colours . . . the excited shouts . . . and the schwoosh of towering sky rockets as they exploded above the pine trees. An unforgettable night.

The shop in Austin Street still stands and serves in the form of a nondescript dairy; it has lost all of its old-time character and charm. The stable is converted into a shed.

In 1926 we shifted away from Austin Street to a house in Miramar, where my father joined his brother in his grocery shop located on the corner of Rex and Park Streets.

*Our thanks to Horace Hawker for allowing us to print the part of his story covering life in Mt Victoria.*