

On Broadway

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Feature Article

Clive King

In the same year that Oakleigh was declared a City, Clive King started out in hardware at 19 Atherton Road. Later that year, King purchased the northeast corner site of Atherton Road and Drummond Street with which his hardware business became synonymous. From 1927 his business remained in the existing shop and premises on site at Atherton Road, for 40 years. Within a decade a timber yard was opened on the main highway at 41-45 Dandenong Road, also known as the Broadway, close to the Oakleigh Hotel on its west side. In partnership with his brother Keith King for a time the Kings were better known as timber merchants than for hardware.

Clive and Keith were the Caulfield born sons of architect Ray Maurice King and his wife Annie Eliza née Hunt. The brothers also successfully developed a line in prefabricated houses, which were distributed throughout the state. Sixty-five designs were available to clients, plans for which were drawn up by the firm's own draughtsman together with

estimates and materials necessary for their erection.

At Atherton Road Allen G. James took a position at Clive King's as a shop assistant, a role that gave him grounding in the supply and sale of timber. He progressed to Clive King's business office and by 1939 was office manager. Twenty years later Allen James and Clive King were two of 31 charter members of Oakleigh Rotary inducted at the charter presentation night at Malvern Town Hall. Allen studied accountancy part time, qualifying in 1940. By then World War II had intervened and he served with the militia from 1940 to 1942. Given his dual qualifications in timber and accountancy, Allen was seconded to the Ministry of Munitions to work in its timber control board. Allen G. James was later a founding member of Oakleigh Historical Society.

A severe shortage of materials and manpower during the War complicated the Kings' businesses. Clive King closed the company's prefabricated housing operation and limited the hours of the retail arm in Atherton Road, opening it only in the afternoon. However the prefabrication part of the business revived when American army personnel were based in Melbourne from 1942 and as a consequence, Clive King's staff was swung into the production of army huts. Sales staff were employed in the mornings at Dandenong Road assisting in the production of the prefabs. At one point American servicemen went to the timber yard, loading semi-trailers with hardwood scantlings for 'use in the Islands', until the yard was bare.

In 1943 the company applied for a permit for a saw mill to be conducted on a new site on Dandenong Road, at Atkinson Street. It was the site of the abandoned St Alipius Church, which had come up for sale. Property values were frozen during wartime and Clive King secured it after prospective buyers at auction were decided by pulling a name from a hat. Despite some opposition from nearby residents worried about noise levels, the proposed sawmill was approved by Council. Logs destined for the mill were transported from the company's logging sites in Gippsland either to mills in Moe and Fumina or railed and milled in the two-acre Oakleigh yard. Kings were asked however to refrain from hauling the logs from the railway by the shortest route along Eaton Street and Atherton Road and to skirt the town by its west along Warrigal Road. Shoppers found this less hazardous.

At this point the businesses operated from three locations: 5-7 Atherton Road as a hardware and timber merchant; at 41-49 Broadway as a timber yard and at 55 Dandenong Road as a saw mill.

Oakleigh's population climbed in post war years and in 1952 was close to 20,000 providing an expanded local market for Clive King. He dissolved his partnership with his brother Keith and a junior partner, leaving them with the timber business. Clive King then concentrated on building both the retail and trade arms of his hardware business. It was made a proprietary company in 1956.

King developed his operation along Drummond Street, having purchased properties between the lane known as Chapman Street and the Methodist Church opposite Warrawee Park. With a full range of domestic and builders' hardware, it became one of the largest businesses of its kind in Melbourne.

In 1960 Clive King Pty Ltd. joined the Mitre 10 co-operative group of hardware stores which provided greater exposure through advertising and better purchasing power. In 1968 the enlarged Atherton Road store was demolished and rebuilt mainly in glass. The loss of the old corner store was a loss to Oakleigh's heritage as its history predated Clive Kings ownership. Operated in 1891 by the Wilkinsons it hosted meetings of the Oakleigh Improvement Committee primarily to secure the Borough of Oakleigh (1891-1924). Also demolished was Number 9 Atherton Road which, by 1967, had been purchased from the McLean Publishing Co, which produced the Oakleigh & Caulfield Times.

When Keith King closed the timber business in Dandenong Road, Clive King Pty Ltd. re-purchased the site for a drive-in centre for its heavy building materials. Another site at the corner of Park Road and Bolch Place near Oakleigh Swimming Pool was purchased. It is remembered as the bulk store and opened in 1971, stocking heavy buildings materials, pipe and cement products and a line in pre-cut furniture. More rebuilding work in Drummond Street commenced when the

trade plumbing department was moved to the new complex. In 1971 the old weatherboard shops that held trade plumbing and paint were demolished.

At its 50th anniversary in 1977 Clive King was still a private company owned by family. Clive King was chairman of the Board and his son, Ross King, managing director.

H G Gobbi

Recollections of Clive King

Clive King bought two shops in Drummond Street from my grandmother Isabella Kay. Part of the deal was he would supply her with firewood for the rest of her life. She was about 70 at the time and he thought she wouldn't be around long but she lived to 99 so it wasn't such a smart deal. The shops were across the lane from Clive King. From one she ran a green grocery cum sweet shop and sold ice cream and lollies. Fresh vegetables for the grocery were bought from the Moroney family farms. The shop had a well and that is where they kept the soft drinks cold. The other one was rented to a lady who did dressmaking and quite often didn't earn enough to pay the rent.

Margaret A. Sykes

Clive King always wore glasses and a grey dustcoat with several pens protruding from the top pocket. The Atherton Road store was arranged so that homewares were at the front; through to the rear were larger appliances such as fridges and stoves. It was possible to exit through large double wooden doors to the laneway, re-enter again through large double wooden doors into a timber section, where lighter timbers such as dowels and plywood were available.

Doug Loveless

My favourite memory of shopping in Oakleigh was in the late 1970s going to the upstairs camping section of Mitre 10 hardware store on the corner of Drummond Street and Atherton Road. Upstairs was a wonderland of all sorts of camping goods with whole tents set up with all the gear inside. I used to imagine holidaying with all that decent equipment but as a young adult I had little money. By contrast downstairs was dark and cramped, chock full of stock. There was a large staircase to the mezzanine level which had a balustrade around it, with large skylights filtering light down to the depths below. The Mitre 10 store was modern in style and closed in the late 1990s when the building was demolished.

Jennifer Jaeger