

JELLIS' BAKERIES

In 1947, a fire destroyed the upper storey of Jellis' Bakeries in Princess Street, Kew. The article in the Argus describes the fire; the number of customers supplied with bread by the bakery (4,000); and lists the Bakeries' other outlets in Balwyn, North Balwyn and Hawthorn. The Bakery would survive the fire, but as with other locally based enterprises, it was to be swallowed up by a larger conglomerate in the 1960s. While the name of the Jellis family graced the business until that time, the family's connection to the business had long past.

It is over fifty years now since the story of Jellis' Bakeries concluded, but the narrative and the people involved make revisiting it worthwhile. It is historically significant that the bakery was the only industrial building, with the exception of 'Fuller's Breweries' and his later organ-building business, to extend to the west side of the Five Ways junction.

From the first decade of the twentieth century, the bakery occupied the large corner block on the corner of Studley Park Road and Princess Street. A 1904 Board of Works map gives some idea of its size, extending from the right-of-way in Studley Park Road to what is currently 15 Princess Street. The site appears much deeper on the 1904 map than that occupied by the current building, but this resulted from the widening of Studley Park Road and the intersection of the Five Ways junction in the 1970s. The 1904 map shows a small building facing Studley Park Road with a shed and bakehouse behind it. The delivery wagons must, during that period, have used the large vacant block on the corner to deliver supplies and collect the bread for home delivery.

The story of the bakery did not begin and end on this now much diminished block of commercial land. Its history stretched back to 1873, when Thomas George Jellis (1849-1916) opened his first bakery on the south side of High Street at the Junction, His shop was located next to the Council Family Hotel. The first bakery was clearly a modest building. A postcard from 1880 shows it to have been a single-storey building with a wide awning over the footpath.

On opening his business, T. G. Jellis took his first steps towards becoming a local business identity. Together with many of Kew's notable businessmen, including Herbert Henty, Samuel Kellett, Francis Barnard and W. H. Wrixon, he contributed to paid advertising to support Henry Hedderwick's campaign be elected to the Borough Council. By 1876, three years after he opened his bakery, he was already tendering for additions and alterations requiring brick and carpentry work.

In the 1880s and 90s, not all things went to plan. In 1882, one of his employees appeared before the Kew Court charged with stealing from the business. Found guilty, he was sentenced to three months imprisonment. At the end of the decade, Thomas Jellis' wife Eliza died aged 42. Finally, in 1898, he was fined for adding alum as a bleaching agent to his bread. (During the nineteenth century, alum was regarded as a contributing factor to the development of rickets in children.)

The fine was not an impediment to T. G. Jellis' commercial or civic success. In the political arena, he was elected to north ward in the municipal elections of 1900 and

became mayor in 1905-06. He was to remain on Council until at least 1911. T. G. Jellis occupied other positions of power and influence in Kew. He was a Justice of the Peace, a deacon of the Congregational Church in Walpole Street, a director of the Kew Recreation Association, a trustee of the Local Manchester Unity Oddfellows lodge, and a president of the Kew Bowling Club.

His bread manufacturing business was also on a similar trajectory. In 1908, he was to able to move his retail outlet to a new shop next to his bakehouse. His new home, 'Wandford', was in a new two-storey building on the corner of Studley Park Road and Princess Street.

The period between 1908 and his retirement was the heyday of his Kew business. In 1910, in a news report of the City of Kew's Jubilee, it was noted that vehicles from his bakery 'turned out, in force', participating in the march from Denmark Street, along High Street to Ridgeway Avenue, and down Cotham Road to the grounds of Xavier College. The theme of celebration was to extend to employer-employee relations. In 1911, 72 adult employees of the company, together with their 70 children, 'drove away from the factory in drags drawn by Mr George Mansfield's spanking teams' to attend the first annual picnic at Mordialloc. After a catered lunch, with attendant toasts to their employer, an adjournment was made to the nearby sports grounds, where races and matches were held. In these games, the 'bakers' were to defeat the 'carters' at cricket, while the carters reigned supreme in the tug-of-war.

Times were different before World War I. First there was the worker picnic at Mordialloc at the end of January, while in February, a 'Bakers' Smoke Night' was to be held at the Empire Hall in Denmark Street. In the Hall, 'bedraped with bunting' and with 'exquisite table decorations', the employees presented T. G. Jellis with two 'handsomely framed photographs of those associated with the bread factory'. After performances by the employees on a piano and later a xylophone, songs and dances continued into the night before an 'enjoyable evening was concluded by the singing of Auld Lang Syne and the National Anthem'.

A further celebration was organised in October 1912, to mark the return of T. G. Jellis and his wife after their tour of England and the Continent. Following songs and speeches, T. G. Jellis eulogised the Australian worker. He announced that 'the working conditions in Australia were far superior to those in Great Britain or on the Continent. He was proud of Australia, and proud of Australian workmen, who could do more in eight hours than some could do in twelve'. After these inspiringly nationalist sentiments, 'the hall was cleared for dancing, which was indulged in till midnight'.

By 1914, T. G. Jellis had passed on the management of the company to his son. It was at this time that the bakery extended its dominance in Kew with the purchase of the Todd Bros., large grain and chaff store in High Street.

Four months after the conclusion of the Gallipoli Campaign in January 1916, T. G. Jellis was to die in his 67th year, leaving a [second] wife and grown-up family. The funeral and burial took place at the Boroondara Cemetery. Padbury's in Cotham Road were the logical choice as undertakers.

Twenty-one years after their founder's death, Jellis' Bakeries became a registered public company. The company directors named do not include a member of the Jellis

family. In the two years following the company being listed, it purchased five new businesses, and sold another.

The company established by T. G. Jellis in 1873 sometimes appeared to be a victim of its own success. A burglary at the factory in 1917 was foiled by the local constabulary, who, while investigating suspicious lights in the factory, discovered that the 'safe had been removed and placed on bags of grain, whilst the keyhole had been plugged with gelignite and had a fuse attached'. Two young men, aged 19 and 22, who were hiding upstairs were apprehended. In their possession was a couple of 'loaded revolvers' and a supply of gelignite. Thieves were more successful in 1951, when they stole a safe from the factory containing about £350. The safe, blown open, was recovered in Templestowe.

While a photograph of the original bakery in High Street can be found in *A History of Kew* by Dorothy Rogers, no photo has been identified of the bakery on the corner of Princess Street and Studley Park Road. The Kew Historical Society would be interested to know if any of Kew's residents have photographs of the bakery that they might donate to the Society's photograph collection, or lend for copying.

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