

Notes about general stores and draperies in rural South Australia 1853 – 1983: ¹ a case study of one family

Overview of relationships and timelines

<i>Generation 1</i>	Theodor Engelbrecht, Shops 1853 – 1880 in Adelaide, Gawler			Theodor Engelbrecht b ² 1828 d ³ 1880		
<i>Generation 2</i>	Ford and Callaghan, Shops 1880 – 1893 in Gawler, Adelaide, Broken Hill Ford, Shops 1893 – 1913 in Orroroo	John Ford b 1848 d 1926: son-in-law of Theodor Engelbrecht	James Callaghan b about 1850 d 1922: son-in-law of Theodor	Theodor Engelbrecht Junior b ⁴ 1855 d ⁵ 1928		
<i>Generation 3</i>	Ford, Shops 1909 – 1933 in Orroroo, Carrieton, Wilmington	Richard Coaker Ford Senior b 1886 – d 1961: son of John Ford				
<i>Generation 4</i>	Ford Brothers, shops 1933 – 1983 in Orroroo Carrieton	John Taiton Ford b 1909 d 1977: 1 st son of Richard Ford senior	Glen Lindsay Ford b 1910 – d 1989 – 2nd son of Richard Ford senior	Richard Charles Ford Junior b 1915 – d 2001 3 rd son Richard Ford senior	Kevin Ford – 1916 – d 1994- 4 th son of Richard Ford senior	Harold Monte Ford b 1919 d 1955 – 5 th son of Richard Ford senior
<i>Generation 5</i>				Margaret Ford b 1946 1 st daughter of R C Ford junior		

¹ This paper presents an abbreviated overview of a large research project. The delivery of this paper at the conference was enhanced by over 50 original advertisements, photographs and maps, all the property of the author.

² b = born

³ d = died

⁴ b = born

⁵ d = died

Generation 1

Theodor Engelbrecht

Theodor Engelbrecht arrived in Adelaide from Prussia in 1850 and by 1853 he had opened a store in Hindley Street Adelaide. Initially he was an ironmonger, ie he sold hardware. By the time he shifted to Gawler in the 1860s he called himself a draper.

Generation 2

Theodor Engelbrecht's daughters married shopkeepers. Augusta Engelbrecht married James Callaghan and a second, Caroline Engelbrecht, married John Ford. John was born in 1848 in Devon England and was the second son of a prosperous yeoman farmer. He arrived in the colony in 1879 with a small inheritance. For two years after his marriage in 1880 John probably worked in the Engelbrecht business in Gawler.

General stores – universal providers

If we entered the general store of James Callaghan, in 1890 in Gawler, we would see grocery items, wine, crockery, ironmongery⁶, bedsteads, china, glass and earthenware.⁷ He also bought perishable goods like eggs, fruit, and vegetables from local producers to sell to his customers.

*Families waited on at home. Customers punctually attended to.*⁸

A general storekeeper was known as a *universal provider*.

Drapery stores

In Theodor Engelbrecht's drapery shop, next to the Callaghan general store, we would see the usual range of drapery goods including hosiery, gloves, print and gingham materials, fancy dress goods, English and foreign silks, shawls and mantles⁹, millinery and straw goods, baby linen and ladies underclothing, table linen and sheetings, Irish linens, table covers, damasks, blankets, quilts, counterpanes, ready made clothing and gentlemen's hosiery.¹⁰

A customer could buy cloth for 5 pence a yard. Goods were displayed outside the shop and inside. Purchases were finalised over a long counter inside, the shopkeeper on one side, the customer on the other. We would find the inside of the shop dark by today's standards. Skylights were used to increase light inside shops.

Street and shop conditions in Gawler

In the 1890s Murray Street Gawler was a dirt road. Bitumen did not become a normal street surface until after 1930. In 1889 a proposal to asphalt¹¹ a portion of Murray Street was discussed

⁶ An ironmonger sold iron and hardware; ironmongery and hardware items are synonymous today.

⁷ 1890, October 10 The Gawler Bunyip newspaper

⁸ 1890, October 10 The Gawler Bunyip newspaper

⁹ A mantle was an overcoat

¹⁰ 1881, The Adelaide Almanac and Directory for South Australia 1881. Advertisement for J Miller Anderson, Hindley Street Adelaide.

¹¹ 'Asphalt is a mixture of sand, gravel and bitumen mixed and laid while still hot, then rolled to a smooth finish. It was introduced for South Australian roads in the 1920s to provide a durable surfacing suitable for motor vehicles with pneumatic tyres. In its natural state it was too slippery for animals and too soft for use by iron tyred vehicles'. Roads Through History Surfaces. History Trust of SA 2003. www.history.sa.gov.au/chu/programs/sa_history/roads/road_history/surfaces.htm

but shelved¹². Shopkeepers complained of dust soiling stock displayed out the front of their shops. In response the Gawler Council bought a horse and watering van¹³ to

*Lay the dust in Murray Street - to the advantage and comfort of the townspeople.*¹⁴

Alas the problem was only temporarily settled.

*The street is pretty well covered with horse droppings. Now, however, the exhalation from the dampened manure is not at all pleasant. [So] a roller brush such as used in Adelaide [was procured to] stay the dust but keep the street sweet and clean.*¹⁵

New horizons – Adelaide and Broken Hill

In 1883 John Ford moved to Morphett Street Adelaide where he leased a shop near the corner of Grote Street, near The Grote Street Model School.

By 1887 John Ford was tempted to try his luck in a new frontier town, Broken Hill, in partnership with his brother-in-law, James Callaghan. The arrival of the railway in Broken Hill in 1888 meant a daily link with Adelaide. Broken Hill was in a transitory state between a mining camp and a mining city.¹⁶ John and James set up business as universal providers, general storekeepers, in the main thoroughfare, Argent Street, next to the two-storey Denver City Hotel, a name that correctly evoked a sense of the Wild West for Broken Hill at the time.

A loss of capital

Unfortunately, in November 1888, an entire block in the main street of Broken Hill was destroyed by fire.

*The flammable nature of the town rendered whole blocks an easy prey to fire. Very few of the buildings are insured ... amongst the many buildings destroyed were Messrs Ford and Callaghan's store. ... It was thought Elliott's [Denver City] Hotel would present a barrier to the flames [and didn't]... In more than one instance crockery was thrown headlong into the street in the hope of saving it from destruction ... The fire brigade tried their best ... Sergeant Saunders visited Finns Hotel, when he was just in time to assist in carrying off Miss Davis, a barmaid.... The scene in Argent Street the next day was truly deplorable - there was nothing but smouldering debris. Messrs Ford and Callaghan were completely burned out. Mr Ford estimates the value of the stock at £8,000 but only £3,000 was covered by insurance.*¹⁷

Direct importers of tea, blankets, rugs,

John Ford and James Callaghan decided to try to recoup their losses and stayed in Broken Hill until mid 1889. To this end they leased new temporary premises and advertised extensively. They advertised the arrival of their stock of blankets and rugs on the steam ship *Austral*¹⁸ at the cost of 3 shillings 11 pence a pair¹⁹ and a

¹² Coombe E H MP *History of Gawler* page 404

¹³ 1889, November 12 reference in Coombe E H MP *History of Gawler*

¹⁴ 1890, January 3 The Gawler Bunyip newspaper

¹⁵ 1890, January 3 The Gawler Bunyip newspaper

¹⁶ 1888, November 6 The Advertiser newspaper

¹⁷ 1888, November 6 The Silver Age newspaper

¹⁸ The steam ship *Austral* made national headlines in 1882 when it accidentally sank in Sydney Harbor and was later raised, refitted and returned to the coastal trade.

¹⁹ 1889, May 21 The Barrier Miner newspaper

shipment of New Teas. 220 boxes, 186 half chests! New teas, direct from the famous Shanghai markets. A splendid household tea, Pekoe flavoured, 1s²⁰ per lb²¹, in half chests. Extra super black tea, 1s 3d²² per lb.²³.

My father²⁴, a fourth generation member of the Engelbrecht/Ford family, remembered dealing with bulk tea in the shop in Orroroo, much later in the 1920s and 1930s.

We'd have to weigh tea that came in big 3 ply wooden tea chests, lined with silver paper. We would weigh it into packets in ordinary brown paper bags, fold the tops over, glue them and up-end them until they were dry.²⁵

Attracting female customers

To attract female customers Ford and Callaghan promoted their splendid assortment of Millinery. Female shop assistants were hired to serve female customers, especially in the selection and sale of female underwear. A dressmaking service for customers was advertised to make up the fabrics sold by the yard in the shop.

[Dressmaking would be] executed at the shortest notice. A thoroughly trained staff under the supervision of a costumer from the leading metropolitan house. A perfect fit. The latest style. Our dressmaking department is under the supervision of Miss Lecky, many years with J Miller Anderson and Co of Adelaide²⁶.

Miller Anderson's was one of the oldest drapery shops in Hindley Street Adelaide, starting business in 1840. It was clever advertising to link one's business to a reputable store in Adelaide.

Back to Gawler

John Ford and James Callaghan parted company as business partners and returned to Gawler where John Ford announced his return in the local newspaper, The Bunyip.

The noted cheap cash draper will re-open on Saturday August 23 [1889] in his old shop, Murray Street (opposite the Lyndoch Road). Having purchased a magnificent stock of the latest and newest summer goods, just arrived per Steam Ship Orient and P & O Line of steamers, [John] will be pleased to see his old friends and the general public - give him a call and see new novelties. John Ford buys for cash and by doing so can sell at the smallest profits.²⁷

After starting business on a positive note in August, a change of tone was detectable by November 1889. Times were difficult; unemployment was high; people had less money to spend in shops. Businesses closed in Adelaide and Gawler. John's brother-in-law, Theodor Engelbrecht junior²⁸ left with his family for brighter prospects in Western Australia, prompted by the discovery of gold in that state.

The fortune of a shopkeeper was inextricably linked to the wealth of the population. The words 'cheap' and 'cash' were emphasised in advertisements. The basics are advertised, for example cheap lengths of damaged cloth.

²⁰ 1s = one shilling, ie 10 cents.

²¹ lb = pound, ie just less than half a kilogram

²² 1s 3d = one shilling and three pence, ie 12 cents

²³ 1889, May 21 The Barrier Miner newspaper

²⁴ Richard Charles Ford Junior b 1915 d 2001.

²⁵ Oral history Richard Charles Ford

²⁶ 1889, May 21 The Barrier Miner newspaper

²⁷ 1889, August 15 The Bunyip newspaper

²⁸ Theodor Engelbrecht Junior 1855 - 1928, son of Theodor Engelbrecht, relocated his business to Geraldton Western Australia.

Damaged calicoes, just arrived SS²⁹ Oroya. JF has just purchased 20,000 yards white calicoes, slightly damaged by rainwater at Port Adelaide. Fine long-cloth 2/11 dozen [yards] usual price 4/11 dozen [yards]. ... Large stock grey calico from 1/11 upwards.³⁰

A new start in Orroroo

The mid north of South Australia beckoned John Ford; perhaps because the area recorded good rains in the early 1890s. Unlike other areas of the state, Orroroo had three seasons with above average rains. Orroroo, 260 kilometres north of Adelaide, is situated on Goyder's Line, a line drawn by Surveyor General Goyder, defining the boundary between areas of reasonable and minimal rainfall. The Orroroo locals have always joked that Orroroo is a windy place. Indeed the crows, it was said, used to fly backwards to keep the dust out of their eyes. It's not so dusty now because the saltbush has been allowed to grow back on the plains; most ploughing north of Goyder's line has stopped.

The post and telegraph office in Orroroo was opened in 1880 by Postmaster-General, Charles Todd.

*When a deputation requested a post and telegraph office for the town, Sir Charles jocularly replied, 'Dear me, there are only two letters in Orroroo, what do you want a post office for?'*³¹

The railway opened up the north with a daily service to and from Adelaide in 1882. There were expectations that the north would be a fertile agricultural area. However, the newspapers noted that rabbits were becoming a nuisance.³²

John Ford opened a drapery store in Orroroo in 1893. It was not an auspicious start because his three-year-old daughter Bertha died a week after the shop opened. Over the five-year period from 1888 both his parents died in England, his young wife Caroline died in Gawler. In addition to Bertha's death, baby Stella died in Broken Hill and John lost his business capital in the fire in Broken Hill. He must have hoped for good fortune for himself when he announced in the Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

*Good news, to the residents of Orroroo and surrounding districts. John Ford (late of Gawler) begs to announce that he has opened a Cash Drapery Store at which they can obtain all classes of new and fashionable goods at Adelaide prices.*³³

As it turned out, Orroroo was a good choice for the Ford family. By 1900 the Orroroo district had a population of 2,100. This was a small community, smaller than Port Elliott is today. The majority of the population were farmers, graziers or labourers and included an extensive range of other occupations. In 1920, for example, Orroroo boasted three hotels, three banks, three bakers, four blacksmiths, three masons, two millers, two saddlers, two tinsmiths and three wheelwrights.³⁴

Generation 3

A young Richard Coaker Ford, son of John Ford, gained valuable experience from 1902 as a window dressing apprentice with business friends of his father. He was a window dresser and

²⁹ SS = steam ship

³⁰ 1890, November 7 The Gawler Bunyip.

³¹ Parnell, Nancy. *Orroroo: Rendezvous of the magpie*, page 51

³² 1893, October 6 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

³³ 1893, October 6 The Orroroo Enterprise

³⁴ Sands and McDougall Business Directory 1920

ticket writer³⁵ with an exclusive shop called The Coliseum in Rundle Street Adelaide. The Coliseum, owned by a business colleague, Charles Moore of Victoria Square, advertised its services as

*High-class dressmakers and milliners, specialists in dress materials, silks, laces, ribbons and gloves*³⁶

Successful experience in Western Australia

In 1907 Richard, usually known as Dick, went to Geraldton Western Australia to work, first with his cousin Theodor Engelbrecht junior, and then with Mr J G Smith, the largest draper north of Perth³⁷. The Orroroo Enterprise reported in 1908

*The friends of Mr Dick Ford will be pleased to read the following complimentary reference to him that appeared in the December issue of The Draper of Australia. The window ... dressed by Mr R Ford ... [has] 4 arches bordered with softly puffed blue and white chiffon arranged against the [plate] glass.*³⁸

Before photographs were 'the norm' in newspapers, articles described events and scenes in great detail. The above article went on to describe

*Strips of pink and white ribbon ... white lace curtains with pale blue silk ... chiffon, upon which sprays of flowers were placed, supported by hat pins, to give the effect of growing ... a large mirror, a hoop, covered with chiffon of pale tints, a trellis arch, a life size wax model, attired in a dainty spring costume, at frequent intervals on the floor were millinery stands, each model being clearly seen. Over two hundred yards of chiffon were used for the display.*³⁹

Window displays became important when large plate glass windows were used in the early 1900s. Shop windows in the 1800s were made up of many small panes of glass, through which it was hard to see a window display. Large plate glass windows in stores were new and innovative. My father, Richard Charles Ford Junior, was always proud of the three plate glass windows in the shop in Orroroo. Window dressing was the cheapest form of advertising and customers could see clearly what was in the window. Customers were advised to 'watch our windows'⁴⁰ or 'all hats advertised will be displayed in our large window'⁴¹.

John Ford and Son

In 1908 Dick Ford married a Geraldton woman, Maud Alma Cream. Maud was also from a shop owning family; the Creams were well off and owned butcher shops. After the wedding in Western Australia, they returned to Orroroo to work with Dick's father John. In 1909 the firm⁴² became *John Ford and Son*.

Dick Ford was an innovative business entrepreneur, taking every opportunity to gain the edge on his competition. In 1909 for example,

³⁵ A ticket writer designed and painted the advertising signs for attaching to items in a shop. He also painted the signs on shop windows and shop frontages.

³⁶ Sands and McDougall South Australia Directory 1900

³⁷ 'Mr Smith ... has the largest retail drapery north of Perth'. Magazine, *The Draper of Australia* 20 December 1907.

³⁸ 1908, February 14 *The Orroroo Enterprise* newspaper

³⁹ 1908, February 14 *The Orroroo Enterprise* newspaper

⁴⁰ 1920, January 17 *The Orroroo Enterprise* newspaper

⁴¹ 1920, November 19 *The Orroroo Enterprise* newspaper

⁴² My father and his brothers always referred to businesses as 'firms'.

*Victoria Martin of Morchard was bitten by a snake at a farm near Morchard. She was taken to the doctor in Orroroo. Mr R C Ford always said that he helped to save her life as she was wearing new cashmere stockings just bought from his shop.*⁴³

Business expansion – the hawker’s van

In 1913 when John Ford retired his son Dick traded as *R C Ford*. In addition to working in the shop, Dick bought a horse drawn hawker’s van and took goods out to the isolated station properties and small townships around Orroroo. For some station women his visit could be their only shopping experience for months. Dick made friends with the station people and they patronised his business. Dick Ford sent a postcard ahead to announce his imminent arrival. The postcard showed a picture of his horse drawn van, sign written with the words

*R C Ford the up-to-date travelling storekeeper. Tailoring a specialty. Direct importer of drapery, clothing, boots and shoes*⁴⁴

On the back the following words announced

*Dear Madam I shall have the pleasure in calling on you on or about [space left for a date stamp, eg 1915] with a large assortment of the Latest Goods both for Ladies and Gentlemen’s wear, also Boots and Shoes. Anticipating the favour of your order, yours respectfully R C Ford.*⁴⁵

A good reputation brings orders come from far afield

As a result of personal contact, station people continued to order goods for many years. In 1931, for example, a telegram from Newcastle Waters, in the Northern Territory requested

*Please send one dozen pair of trousers size fours and fives, eighteen striped shirts with different stripes, one good rug about three pounds, two cheap rugs, twenty yards of strong double width unbleached calico, one dozen yards strong print, one dozen reels white sewing cotton next mail H M Bathern.*⁴⁶

Expansion to Carrieton

The family workforce helped extend the Ford businesses. Dick Ford opened a store in 1919 in Carrieton, 295 km from Adelaide and later Wilmington in the mid 1930s. Carrieton is 35 km north west of Orroroo. The Carrieton store opened initially as a convenient depot for stock for the hawker’s van.

Free gift with purchase

Dick offered a free gift with purchase at particular times. In December 1920, for example, he gave away a free writing pad with each purchase. Each pad comprised a blotter and 80 sheets of the best quality writing paper⁴⁷ and featured a front cover showing three pictures: the Orroroo and Carrieton shops plus the hawker’s van.

Make the most of every opportunity

⁴³ The District Centenary Committee, 1976. Reflections: *The Story of Morchard District and the Hundred of Coomooroo, Morchard* page 103.

⁴⁴ Text on front of postcard owned by author

⁴⁵ Text on obverse of postcard owned by author

⁴⁶ 1931, April 28 Telegram

⁴⁷ 1920, December 10 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

Every opportunity was turned to a business advantage as the following story illustrates. When, in 1921, the first aeroplane landed in Orroroo, the local newspaper told the story

*Quite a stir was caused among the community on Friday morning last when Captain Kennedy and Lieutenant Miller piloted their Armstrong Whitworth plane over the business centre and began to plane down in circles in search of a decent landing space. The dusters of the drapers' assistants fell idly while everyone seemed bent on cultivating a stiff neck. As the aviators planed low down toward the racecourse and it became clear that they were going to roost for a while, a rush was made for cars, traps and carts and a spirited set to began and dust began to rise on the eastern road. Bagot's car (with Westy Harslett at the wheel) took the lead on Frank Lock hanging grimly on, and the pair was on the spot in time to enjoy some of the landing dust and flying grass. A moke of above 30 summers and Lord knows how many winters, fought it out with a trap full of workers, and it was not long before Mr Dick Ford arrived on the scene with a bundle of advertising matter under his arm, and getting in promptly, he had the first flight in company of Mr M W Forrester. In a very short time the heavens over the town was filled with streams of handbills. Saturday afternoon and Sunday found the flying men still busy and half of Orroroo seemed to be living overhead. The birdmen left for Quorn early in the week.*⁴⁸

By 1921 Dick Ford had seven children, five boys and two girls. As the five boys grew up, they worked in the firm. Dick Ford taught his boys the skill of sign or ticket writing and tutored them in advertising techniques from an early age. I remember my father having a drawer full of brightly coloured poster paints and expensive sable brushes for sign writing. My father practised this skill for many years, preparing posters and signs for local events in our community.

Advertising in the local newspaper, The Orroroo Enterprise was regular and varied. In 1919, for example, women's underwear, handbags and hats were advertised. The family has a relic from this era, a pair of ladies long legged nickers, delicately decorated with fine lace on the legs, a draw string at the waist, no elastic, no crutch, labelled with the brand *The Empire* – a lady in long skirts could not lift her skirt and stays, so nickers had to be crutchless!

*Ford's Specials. 200 ladies' Calico Camisoles trimmed with Lace and Embroidery 3/11 for 2/9. 120 Pairs White Stockingette Combinations, 4/11 for 3/6 pair. 80 Ladies' Leather Sample Hand Bags, slightly soiled, to be sold less than cost prices. A table full of Ladies' Summer Trimmed Hats ...all one price 5/9. R C Ford THE STORES FOR GOOD VALUES. Orroroo Telephone 21 and Carrieton private letter box 7*⁴⁹

My father remembered his father being a good businessman.

*Pop had the shop very well stocked, and a very good business, all drapery, footwear, menswear, millinery. He even had a boot maker and a tailor. Men worked in the shop doing just that for pop. He was an exceptionally good salesman; he could sell anything. If a chap went in to buy one shirt he'd come out with two or three. He was a great one getting down to town to G & R Wills where he would buy up lots of travellers samples, shoes or boots or hats or different things and he'd put on a terrific big display in the window.*⁵⁰

A market leader

Dick Ford was a market leader whenever possible. The following example illustrates this claim. Although stainless steel was invented in 1913, it was the late 1920s before stainless steel was

⁴⁸ 1921, February 11 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁴⁹ 1919, January 10 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁵⁰ Interview Richard Charles Ford 1983

used for bone handled cutlery knife blades. Dick had sets made expressly for his own use at home. They were engraved with the words

*Made in Sheffield for Richard C Ford Orroroo: Firth Stainless*⁵¹

When friends and relatives admired these bone-handled knives, Dick had other sets made to sell in his shop and advertised them in this way

*Special Bargains: warranted best Sheffield Stainless steel knives, neither rusts, tarnishes, no stains. Table knives 9/6 half dozen, desert knives 8/9 half dozen. Cutlery made from this steel is unaffected by food acids, vinegar, or other matters and is in consequence a universal boom. R C FORD, the store for good value, Orroroo.*⁵²

Free advertising is common today on items like T-shirts and clothing. In 1929 Dick sold knives engraved with the words

*Made expressly for Orroroo Cash and Carry Co Orroroo: Firth Brearley Stainless*⁵³

The depression years

When economic times became hard in 1929, the name of the firm became *Orroroo Cash and Carry*. Credit accounts were actively discouraged. When creditors could not pay the shopkeepers suffered. My father always said that although Dick tried to avoid extending credit, he did accept goods in lieu and did offer credit to some people. It was difficult to refuse a man food or shoes for his children when you saw him often in the street and at church every Sunday. In hard times basic goods were stocked and sold, items like boots, groceries, tea, sugar and various tinned foodstuff.⁵⁴

Active participation in the local community was a critical factor for the success of local business, especially in hard times. The Ford family used to offer their sizable front lawn for a popular pastime in the 1930s, a lawn dance.

*Last Thursday evening a lawn dance conducted in aid of the Orroroo Band was held on Mr R C Ford's lawn. The weather was perfect, and the attendance was good. The gate receipts amounted to £9.*⁵⁵

Orroroo had supported up to five drapers and four general stores before 1900. By the 1930s there were three general stores that survived because the population shopped locally and supported local businesses. Brian Dowling, son of one of the publicans of the 1930s said

*One week we gave our order to Ford's, the next Ackland's, and the next Fogden's. Everyone got a turn.*⁵⁶

The local newspaper promoted shopping locally. Advertising stressed that goods could be bought at Adelaide prices.

Support local industry. All of our drapers are busy – deep in sales – and prices are cut to a minimum. The careful housewife could do no better than consult those price lists flying around the district. Standing outside a local draper's windows during the week, a cope of

⁵¹ Engraving on knife in possession of author.

⁵² 1929, July 11 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁵³ Engraving on knife in possession of author.

⁵⁴ Interview Richard Charles Ford 1983

⁵⁵ 1930, January 23 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁵⁶ Interview Brian Dowling

visitors was overhauling prices through the glass. 'Heavens', exclaimed the first lady, 'only 1/6 a yard. Why, I paid 2/3 in Adelaide for the same stuff.' 'Yes,' chimed in number two, 'I bought (producing something – I didn't look too closely) they cost more in the city than I paid here for it.'⁵⁷

Generation 4

Dick Ford had 5 boys who were an asset to the shops but caused some headaches at times, especially on New Year's Eve when the young lads of the town got up to mischief. Shifting people's back yard toilets was a favourite trick.

*Mr von de Borch, the police officer, extends heartfelt greetings to the whole of the people of the Orroroo and district for a happy and prosperous new year. He wishes to thank all the lads of the town for being so good on New Year's Eve which is a record as not as much as a stone was removed.*⁵⁸

And the local newspaper at times took a moralistic tone to admonish some of its younger readers

*Lads! If you've got to swear in the evenings passing down the main street get out in the road. Remember that you are passing windows and that within there is probably someone's mother or sister – you have your own sister. Nuff sed [sic].*⁵⁹

In 1932 the next generation were old enough to work with their father, Dick Ford. My father described how business was conducted in hard times. Bartering was common.

*When I was working at Orroroo we used to go out on the Willowie Plains to collect butter and eggs. We would keep wet cloths on it but it was a bit soft by the time we got back to the shop. There was no refrigeration in those days. We used to store it all downstairs in the cellar in the shop. We would deliver goods in a Chev 6 truck. People would be expecting us. We got to know them very well. Sometimes people would be a bit poor and couldn't pay in cash so we'd take chickens, roosters, and calves, anything that would make up the money. Occasionally we'd buy a bag of wheat. We always had a yard full of calves and fowls at home. We would give the customer cash for butter and eggs and deduct what they owed us for groceries. During harvest we used to take out binder twine and sewing twine, plough shares and cultivators. There was not too much that we didn't sell. We would take their paper and sometimes their mail, to help them out, rather than them coming into Orroroo. On Friday nights we would load the truck up with eggs and butter and different produce and we'd take it down to Adelaide. Then we would back load and bring back goods with us, tea, sugar, everything. We would go to Wood Sons for general grocery items and deliver the butter to the Menz Biscuit Factory. There was lots of exchanging of goods, value for value. Some of the stuff used to come up by rail. Various places used to buy eggs, 21 dozen to a kerosene case in cocky chaff.*⁶⁰

Entertainment, courting and dancing

The young people in Orroroo travelled miles to go to dances. The same vehicle that was used for business during the week, also ferried the young people to dances. When courtship got serious for the eldest Ford son, Jack, he was in the market for an engagement ring. Ford's always shopped with Wendts in Adelaide; loyalty and trust were hallmarks of shopping. Jack Ford sent to Adelaide for an engagement ring. Up came a selection of engagement rings on the daily train, sent on

⁵⁷ 1919, January 31 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁵⁸ 1933, January 6 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁵⁹ 1919, February 14 The Orroroo Enterprise newspaper

⁶⁰ Interview Richard Charles Ford Junior

approval from Wendts. The fiancé chose the ring and the others were sent back on the next train. An invoice for the ring followed. Imagine doing that today! Shopping practices involved a lot of trust.

Five Ford sons working in the firm

The five Ford sons worked in the firm. Jack Ford took over Orroroo Cash and Carry in 1934 and worked in the original Ford shop until the 1960s. In about 1937 Glen Lindsay Ford bought the Carrieton store from his father and worked there with his wife and family until the 1960s. The shop in Carrieton opened on Sunday mornings to allow church congregations to shop and thus only make one trip to town in a week.

Sons Richard Charles Ford Junior and Kevin Ford opened and managed a third store in Wilmington from the mid 1930s. Wilmington was 50 km west of Orroroo. Richard Ford Junior remembered

*I went across to Wilmington. We opened up a branch there which was a much bigger shop [than Carrieton]. I started off there with one girl in the drapery side and brother Kevin there with me. I was there until 1939. At Wilmington we had a house at the back of the shop. We used to sleep there and had our meals in the hotel. There was no bathroom so I used to shower at the hotel.*⁶¹

After the war that took four of the five boys away to fight in the Australian Infantry Forces, Kevin and Monte Ford started with a few pots and pans and developed Ford Brothers Hardware in Orroroo in 1947, next to the drapery store run by his brother Jack. After Monte's death and Jack's retirement Kevin was the last Ford trading in Orroroo.

Shop hours and staff loyalty

In the 1950s shop hours in Orroroo were from eight in the morning until six on weekdays and from eight until eleven thirty on Saturdays. There was no Sunday trading in Orroroo. Kevin commented that one of the most annoying things for the shopkeeper was the customer who wanted the shop to re-open after hours, especially after Saturday morning trading. Kevin told the following story

I told Aunty Hett⁶² [who lived with the family in Orroroo] 'If anyone rings I am not home'. Sure enough the phone rang and someone wanted me to open the shop. Aunty Hett said 'Kevin is not home.' The chappy on the phone asked her a question and she said 'I don't know when he will be home'. The persistent customer asked again when Kevin would be home. 'Just a minute says Aunty Hett. Kevin what time will you be home?'⁶³

Apart from family, additional staff members were required. Staff members were employed for years. Fay Symes, for example, was already working in the shop when I was a little girl in the early fifties. Recently my eldest aunt was 94 and Fay rang her for her birthday. My aunty Edna still sends and receives Christmas cards from staff that worked for Ford's.

1983 - the end of an era

In 1983 when Kevin Ford closed the last family business in Orroroo, the Fords had traded continuously for 90 years in the mid north. 1983 heralded the end of an era when the last Ford in business in Orroroo retired.

⁶¹ Interview Richard Charles Ford 1983

⁶² Henrietta May Rowe Ford, sister of Richard Coaker Ford

⁶³ Interview Kevin Ford 1983

*Mr Ford and his wife Evelyn are retiring from business bringing the Ford family's 90-year history of commercial activity in Orroroo to a close. It all began when John Ford, Kevin's grandfather opened John Ford Draper's ... John Ford was succeeded by his son Dick in the early 1900s and the adventurous Dick who was a qualified window dresser and ticket writer brought special display skills to the business. ... The cash and carry philosophy carried the business right through the Depression years.*⁶⁴

⁶⁴ 1983, June 23 The Review Times Record: Peterborough Burra Jamestown

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