

## THE NOEL WITHERS STORY

Interviewed at General Meeting December 2011

I moved from Devon, in the south west of the country, where I grew up as a child, I moved to East London. While I was there "I got into bad company" - I met two Australians, one was from Queensland, "rough as G!!" the other was from Adelaide, a perfect gentleman, between the two of them, they persuaded me I should come to "Gods own country" Australia. I eventually did.

After rubbishing hell out of me about ten pound poms, I found I could get a Tramp Steamer from Norway, and work my passage to Australia, they told me, in no uncertain terms, that I was a ?/# & ?/#, idiot, when you could go for ten pounds. I came to Australia in 1964, just to look at the place and stay for about two years, and here I am forty seven years later, still here, so there must have been something good about the place.

I met my wife here. When I was living London, we guys put our heads together and decided, that at twenty seven, it was probably time to get married, even though most people in Australia were getting married at a much younger age, at twenty nine, I thought it was time I was married, I thought jeepers, I had better do something about this, that was when Cath came along. She has kept me on the straight and narrow since.

We were married at Essendon, she was an Essendon girl, just down hill from Windy Hill, obviously a very religious Essendon fan she is. (I have to put up with that every winter). I met her in a theatre groups, would you believe. This is a line she has heard many times, "and there has been drama ever since."

Question from Faye - *Were you ever in the same play?* Noel: I don't think so, although I did sing to her once, and she still married me.

Question from Marilyn - *What boat did you come out on?* Noel: I didn't come out by boat, I came out by plane, there were sixty three people on the plane and only three of us were not sick on the flight. Every time we landed the three of us would nick of somewhere and have a drink, because everyone else on the plane was "throwing up". I used to be really sick when travelling in a bus when I was a little boy, but I managed to survive for three days with a little boy sitting next to me throwing up all the way. It was terrible.

Question from June - *When did you come to Greensborough?* Noel: I had been over to see my brothers and my parents Christmas 1969/70, and when I came back I got a job selling audio equipment and electronics with Ensell Electronics until I got a job with Diamond Valley Council, that was really good. I gave Encells away and just worked for them part time. That was when the Diamond Valley Council Office was in Main Street, the Engineers and Town Planning were in the old Methodist Church Hall which was freezing in the winter and stifling in the summer,

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If there was a breeding ground for mossies in Greensborough, it was that hall because, when it rained it seemed to come in under the door and wet all the carpet, the breeding ground was in the carpets.

Then they built the "Taj Mahal" up on the hill which Nillumbik now uses. I helped set out the roads there and saw the building of the place, and that was the best office I have ever worked in, the most comfortable office, so if Nillumbik don't think it's a good office, they should work in some of the offices I have worked in. The old Heidelberg offices are much like the ones up on the hill there.

Question from June - *You have obviously been interest in the history of Greensborough for sometime. Did you start researching when you first came here?* Noel: My dad is responsible for my interest in history; he was interested in both history and religion, and was the only man I know who invited the Jehovah Witnesses in; I have to say half an hour later, they were anxious to get out.

What happened when working up at the Diamond Valley Offices, I found the Greensborough Cemetery was in a bit of a state. Wally Butterworth was the only Trustee and he wasn't well, and hadn't been for quite sometime, he had not done anything for a long time.

There were originally three Trustees but the other two had died. The Health Commission was anxious that the council take over the running of the cemetery, eventually they did but not for many years later.

In the mid 1970's. I got involved a bit and managed to get some money from Council to do a bit of work there, it was mainly done by APEX, the Bundoora Scouts and volunteers, we used to put it in the newspaper that there was going to be a working bee at the cemetery, and that was fantastic, you might have a dozen people up there, anymore and you would be in each other's way.

We laid crushed rock down for paths and managed to get some memorials tidied up and that sort of thing. As we know, these days it is all on the descendants to do the work. Eric is doing a fantastic job up there right now. I got to know the people within the cemetery, the pioneers, initially; we only had records up till 1933 and no plan at all.

I started measuring from the fence trying to find where the graves and monuments were, it was pretty hopeless to workout where anybody was, then in 1994 two exercise books "the old Koala exercise some of you will remember" were plonked on my desk, these records were from 1933 to 1963. Sent by someone, we don't know who. They had been sent to the Shire of Tullerook, fortunately, nobody threw them out, they were sent to the Health Commission and then to Diamond Valley, what was good is, from that, I was able to get a licensed surveyor to come out and we went out and did a proper survey and from that were able to place pretty well every body that was up there.

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As you all know, Val has done a tremendous amount of research, {she is related to most of the people in the cemetery anyway}. We keep finding additional people, mainly children, there are almost 360 people there. The earliest burials we know of were in 1861, including two children, Mary Lima aged 7 and one of George Chapman's children I think his name was Joseph, they were probably popped in graves with other people.

From that, I have been collecting information for the last 35 years or so.

Every time I walk along the Plenty River, if you don't look behind you or block out the sound of barking dogs, you could be in the bush, one side of the river is pristine still, and the other side is totally developed, but wonderful history the more you look the more there is.

If you go into Trove, we are so lucky these days to have so much information, it is like Charles Buck, who I thought was a fine upstanding man, and I thought he would have been a member of Rotary or the Chamber of Commerce, that sort of thing, then we find out he was jailed for two years for embezzlement. It is wonderful to find that sort of thing, the life they must have led, Faye and Gary have some idea of what it must have been like to not have running water, electricity, a flush toilet and !!the night man used to come!! and that sort of thing, what it must have been like in the 1850's & 60's.

Comment from Faye – "We put everything on the garden. It was good for something."

Members comments – Talking about the bushland, I went for a walk on Monday, the bush out the back of Greensborough, just a couple of kilometres from Main Street, over where the old airstrip was in the second world war, it is all houses now, just out the back of Janefield. I am not kidding, there were hundreds of kangaroos, down where the old mill used to be. There are still some of the old buildings there, like the Officers Mess etc., the bluestone fireplace in the Officers Mess is still standing.

Noel: About two or three years ago I was over there, I counted three lots of kangaroos, in the first lot I counted there were about 50, there were 50 – 60 in each group, an awful lot of kangaroos.

June Hall nee Evans