

A ROUSING OF A RIDING

by Eric Stephensen. 1978

The region known as Eltham North may well be regarded as an anachronism, that is, it is out of keeping with the times. This definition is not wholly true, or entirely realistic, and many residents will resent the imputation, others may wryly consider it has some justification.

The name itself, ELTHAM NORTH, as all residents know, is nothing else but downright confusing nonsense as it is not North Eltham and is not part, nor is it to the north either of the township or the Shire of Eltham, and the inability of residents to agree on a more distinctive name is undoubtedly part of the anachronism.

A stranger travelling on the roads of Eltham North would express some surprise that there are not to be seen any horse-drawn or bullock-drawn vehicles, for the state of most of the roads is such that these are what would be expected to travel on these almost entirely gravel roads. Most of the roads have, in fact, been formed up and widened so that they look like roads but some short sections still look like bullock tracks.

Once upon a time, maybe less, who cares, the Assistant Regional Town Planner, or whatever he was called in those days, was sitting hunched upon a hard seat in a dark dingey office in the township of Melbourne. He was surrounded by masses of papers and maps and pretending to write whilst nibbling on a chunk of hard bread and covertly reaching in his hip pocket for his flask of rum. He hurriedly shoved these under the desk as he heard the heavy footsteps of his superior, the Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Regional Town Planning. He trembled as the ponderous bulk loomed above him. "Ah" said the A.D.C.R.T.P. "I have noticed that there is a settlement here on the map called Diamond Creek. The mining of diamonds will be a most important adjunct to the colony. You will immediately arrange to survey a convenient road between this settlement and the river Yarra Yarra". As he departed his clerk groaned at the thought of the work ahead. Then he thought "damn, there is another way." Placing the map before him he meticulously drew a straight line, north to south, from the settlement at Diamond Creek to the Yarra Yarra river. "That will fix it" he said. How right he was!

It should not be presumed that there is any truth in this pretty story, but it COULD have happened. In actual fact, many early government roads were laid out in a grid pattern without regard to the nature of the terrain and legend has it that Diamond Creek was named after a bullock called Diamond.

Some time later, when it was decided to give a name to this line, it was noticed that it crossed the boundary of the Shire of Eltham, so from the river to there it was named Bolton Street and from there to Diamond Creek it was called Ryans Road. Mr. Kennedy (who lived near St. Clems Road) arranged that the government road should be called Ryans Road. Ryan was a butcher of Caledonia (later called Diamond Creek). He came there in 1856 when he was six months old. He regularly travelled along the road which was to bear his name.

When the surveyor of the railway line got to the patch of thick bush called Bolton Street he said "Ah nobody will ever form this up into a road; it is no good putting an overhead bridge here we shall stick one up further along where there is a cutting."

In the meantime a wandering bullock wagon wanted to go to Diamond Creek settlement so the bullocky crossed over the Diamond Creek, north of the Eltham settlement, then going west made a winding way up the hills till he got to where he thought Ryans Road should be, then he made his way from there. This track was later farmed up to become the main road to Diamond Creek-what is now known as Wattle Tree Road continued only as far as Cedar Avenue. Travellers wishing to go beyond this point had to pass through toll gates on Murray's property. The toll gate was to the north of the War Memorial Hall and the other on the hilltop of Murray's property. The only known personal recollection of this toll is that of Mr. Bill Sidwell of Eltham North who advised that Mr. Gene Murray charged the baker an annual fee to drive his horse and cart through the Murray property on his way to and from Diamond Creek. At the present time a wire cyclone gate can be seen opposite Maxwell's and fronting a path. This gate leads to a now dis-used road which winds round through the trees and ends east of Ryans Road on Wattle Tree Road.

This road was constructed during the depression years, before the last war, by the unemployed on sustenance. It was known as Murray's Road and replaced the toll. Later a new road was bulldozed in a more direct line and this became known as Diamond Creek Road and then was Wattle Tree Road. The Maxwell's have never approved of the latter and in the telephone book their address is listed as Diamond Creek Road.

No doubt, over the centuries, numbers of aborigines must have roamed and hunted over this area but they left no records and their departure from these lands was barely noticed. It can only be stated that it is on record that the first 'whitefellers' here, Mr. and Mrs. Larimour, camped for one night only, near the Diamond Creek in 1847. Other early dates recorded were the parents of Mr. Wilson of Ryans Road who were the first couple married in St. Margaret's Church, Eltham, about 1865 and Eugene Murray born at Eltham North in 1868.

After all the big timber had been cut out of the place, some more bullock tracks were surveyed out and some tough settlers started building shacks around these parts. Some even tried to make a living off the place, clearing the remaining bush off the creek flats and some hillsides, planting orchards which mostly died of thirst, doing some dairying and firewood cutting, and everyone had the inevitable chooks.

The Danseys on the creek flats, Mr. Page and the Cromes on Ryans Road lasted out longer than the others. Up to about ten years ago Mr. Page's cattle roamed over the length and breadth of the unfenced Eltham Heights Estate looking for grazing and water, and it was a familiar sight to see Mr. Page riding around on horseback rounding up his stock, going shopping or just riding. But as more and more residents came into the area, Mr. Page and his cattle came in for some abuse till eventually he was forced to keep his stock at home.

It is apparent that the first settlers came to Eltham North about 120 years ago. At that time the very few roads were only rough tracks winding their way through great forests of bushland. At that time Melbourne was only a small country town in the Colony of Victoria and settlers arriving by sailing ships pitched tents and built rough humpies from bush timber in the area now known as South Melbourne.

There were practically no machines of any kind and all transport was by horse and bullock drawn vehicles. Almost everybody rode horses or walked great distances. Walkers carried heavy loads and pushed or pulled carts and wheelbarrows.

Very few settlers had any money and as there were no government subsidies or pensions in those days they had to work for very long hours to clear their land to grow their food, to build their own houses and fences from bush timber. But they did these things and survived somehow. At times, all that many of them had to eat was wallaby and pumpkin stew. But, however hard it was, it was still better to have their own houses and land in Australia than to be stuck in a rented house in a slum in Europe.

Following the discovery of gold at Anderson's Creek, Warrandyte, by Louis Michel on June 30th, 1851, there were fossickers all over the hills and gullies and the Eltham North area was well picked over. One mine existed just outside the area, being located at the former Hassall's Gallery at Research. The late Mrs. Schofield reported that there was a mine shaft on her property in the sand pits at the junction of Ryans Road and Ramptons Road; there was also another sand pit about a mile further west.

These extraordinary sand pits on the tops of hills also provided an unusual local industry. In fact, they were not really sand pits but gravel deposits being thought to be remains of an old river bed. Similar deposits are also found at Kangaroo Ground and Lower Plenty. A top layer, about 1 foot deep, consists of a tight mixture of sand. It is not known how deep the deposits are, or were, but it is thought they could be ten feet or more in places. It was found that when the lower deposits were exposed to the air, they set very hard and the mixture was ideally suited for driveways and for filling up potholes on the road. A great deal was carted away in horse drawn drays for these purposes.

With the constituent of the gravel, it is apparent that if lime is added and the mixture baked, a very tolerable cement mixture will result. With the addition of water it should then make a rather solid concrete. As the Diamond Valley Council is constantly scratching it's head to raise funds for road-making perhaps it should investigate the possible thousands of tons of almost ready-made concrete still lying on the surface of Ryans Road, Ramptons Road and Highpoint Crescent.

Up to about ten years ago the "Glen Park" area of Eltham North had a quality delightful to most people. Practically all the houses were constructed of what might be called the "Early Colonial" style. All over Australia houses of this type were built and many thousands of them still exist, but rarely within the Melbourne metropolitan area were there so many so close together as at Glen Park. The method of construction was crude, but practical, being built by people who were too hard-up to build better. It consisted of a rectangular wooden framework covered by weather boards or fibro-cement and divided into two or more rooms with roofing of corrugated galvanised iron rising in an inverted 'V'. From the front a skillion roof extended to form a verandah about six feet wide. This was often latticed in with perhaps one end boarded off to make another room. Later a back verandah was added and then this would be boarded off to make more rooms. If the family still grew a further back verandah would be added and perhaps this too would be boarded off.

These houses were entirely dependent on tank water and they were usually surrounded by a varied assortment of galvanised iron tanks. Despite the shortage of water, most of the houses were fronted by bright geraniums and struggling bushes such as honeysuckle. Green lawns were unheard of, their place being taken by scraggy grasses. The house-wife sweated away in a hot stuffy kitchen with a wood stove and did her laundry in a copper and galvanised iron tubs in a shed at the back. And every house had a wood heap. Cutting firewood was supposed to be the privilege of the man of the house, but many women had to learn to be good at it. The kids went there to collect sticks and chips and many young lovers spent their time there also.

Some of the newer residents tended to poke fun at these old houses and said they should be all pulled down, however, it was home to many and this was important to them. There were also a rare few who thought that these old houses should be preserved at all costs as they gave to the Glen Park area a certain unique quality, for it was noticeable that the people were a friendly lot who all knew each other. The only church in the area was a weatherboard structure known as the Gospel Hall and nearly everybody went there to pray and join in social activities.

And for dances and such, which could not very well be held in the Gospel Hall, it was not very far to the public hall. Like many of the houses, this building was made out of bits and pieces dragged from here and there and put together. It was never finished and looked like an old barn, but it suited the people of Glen Park and nearly all of them had a lot of fun there.

Although Glen Park had a true country township atmosphere it was not really a town, for it had no pub, no Mechanics Institute, and in fact almost nothing except a tiny post office which balanced itself precariously on high wooden posts on a steep hillside, so that you could step onto the verandah straight from the road on one side but had to be mighty careful not to fall off the verandah, resting on high blocks, on the other side of the building. The area was also remarkable in that it had no name, only a road called Glen Park and the name of the Post Office was not Glen Park but it had a foolish name that some outsider stuck on to it.

The Glen Park area continued to plod along in it's own contented way and it became noticeable that more houses were being built in the area. These were not in the good old style at all. Most of them were erected by professional builders, supposedly for the comfort and convenience of the owners. Yet it was noticed that many were rather odd-looking structures, being queer jumbles of stones, bricks and wood, but nicely painted over and dolled up to be something special. They were somewhat larger than the old houses and this was especially done so that the owners could spend more money than they could afford, not only to build them but to pay the cost of heating them up in the winter.

Ridiculously enough, the Eltham North area was then part of the City of Heidelberg, and if anyone wanted to go to the Town Hall to see the Mayor, or his dog, or even to see the alderman who was supposed to represent the area, it took him a whole day to get there and back. Not that the trip did any good because those fellows at the Heidelberg Town Hall regarded Eltham North as being on the other side of the moon, or even did not know it existed.

There were also other people in the outer areas of the City of Heidelberg who thought their areas were being neglected too and gradually a feeling developed that a new shire should be formed. This took quite a few years of hard work by a lot of people. Eventually someone became fed up with all these protracted dealings and so after some fuss and excitement, a genie was hired from Arabia, and one morning all those people woke to find themselves in the new Shire of Diamond Valley. At Eltham North, the North ward of the City of Heidelberg became the South East Riding of the Shire of Diamond Valley and who else but a genie could have affected such a change?

On Wednesday 30th September, 1964 the Diamond Valley Council met for the first time in the Council Chamber at Greensborough. The new Councillors of the new Shire of Diamond Valley had the wonderful idea that they could reduce everybody's rates and at the same time build new roads everywhere. It took a few years before they woke up to the fact that only mugs would think like that, so the rates were increased to where they were before, only more so. However, some good came of the new Shire, because now, if you wanted to see what a councillor looked like, you could hop, step and jump along Ryans Road to where Councillor Colclough lived; and one day Cr. Colclough became shire President and this was remarkable for now there was a Shire President practically sitting on your doorstep; and what was more, this very important person was actually seen around the place, attending Progress meetings, and listening carefully to what anyone had to say. Cr. Colclough proved himself a mighty man, for many years selflessly giving his spare time in a voluntary capacity to further and improve the lot of the people of Eltham North, and of the Shire of Diamond Valley—and, wonder of wonders, Cr. Colclough did even succeed in having Ballowa Road bitumenised. In fact, few Eltham North residents used it.

Some time after the line had been drawn on the map from Diamond Creek settlement to the Yarra Yarra River, a survey team was sent out along it. They expected to do the job in a few weeks but it took much longer. The poor fellows had a terrible time, blundering through the heavy bush and they quickly found that the road, as a road, was an utter impossibility, except perhaps to ancient Romans or future superman, for it's way led over the worst possible route, up and down precipitous hills and across steep gullies, with hardly a flat section to it. At any rate, for better or worse, they completed the job and the line on the map was officially gazetted as a certified Government Road.

A fair road went from Diamond Creek to the gravel pits at the top of the hill at Ramptons Road. The section of Ryans Road between Ramptons Road and the bottom of the deep gully by the Eltham boundary was then known as Balakian's Hill, after an Armenian who owned the property known as "Balgay" now owned by Mr. William Peck. This road was very rough and older residents report that when carts went down this hill, a sapling was thrust between the back wheels and this acted as a brake, the carts actually sliding down the hill. Perhaps the last horse-drawn vehicle in the area was that of the Eltham milkman. About twenty one years ago, Balakian's Hill was formed up and graded by the Heidelberg Council.

In all your life, if you went for a thousand miles, you would never find such a beautiful straight road on the map, but when you tried to follow it, you found such a tangle of bits and pieces of road, winding in and out and up and down and sometimes you didn't know whether you would end up in Eltham or Greensborough or get lost and have to camp for the night somewhere.

About the time that Balakian's Hill was first graded, Ryans Road bristled out in a rash of electric light poles put up by the S.E.C. to bring some home comforts to the forgotten pioneers of Eltham North.

Up to about forty years ago there was a large area of bushland bordered on the north by Glen Park Road, on the south and east of the Shire of Eltham and on the west by Ryans Road. All the big timber had been cut out and bushfires had gone through it a few times leaving only light bush timber and low scattered undergrowth. There had been no complete bush clearing for agricultural purposes, except for a small area on the banks of Diamond Creek opposite Railway Parade. At that time the owners would have been delighted to receive ten thousand dollars for the whole area. But the country was experiencing the depression prior to World War 11 and no one would buy it.

It was poor land with clay surface and practically no top soil and would graze little more than one bandicoot to the acre. So the area was surveyed out with roads and subdivided into lots. At that time there were no council by-laws that roads must be formed up and if building by-laws existed they were not enforced, the situation being much more free and easy than at present. So then this area became known as the Eltham Heights Estate.

At about the same time, a smaller area of land between Weidlich Road, Ryans Road and Ramptons Road was also subdivided and these two estates comprised about one third of the area known now as Eltham North.

During the Depression, no one believed that anyone would ever build on the Eltham Heights Estate. From 1940 onwards a slow buying and selling went on but only a few houses were built on the fringes, mainly along Ryans Road. An exception was a house built by Mr. Jack at the lowest part of Scenic Crescent, near Diamond Creek, with a rough bush road leading to it. Later on a few more houses and shacks began to appear along the section of Scenic Crescent, near Elm Crescent.

Up to this time there was a delightful bush country township at Eltham, with a small post office store where Patterson's now stands. There were large gum trees scattered along the road leading through it and on the railway side stood the attractive Shillinglaw Cottage, a blacksmithy, a small weatherboard grocer shop, and a garage with petrol pumps beside the kerb. The site now occupied by the post office was a vacant lot and access to the small weatherboard railway station was direct from the road to the Eltham side and across the rails from the Diamond Creek side.

With more people commencing to live on the hills, some resentment began to make itself felt in regard to access to the shopping centre at the township of Eltham. To get there by road, it was necessary to follow a circuitous route, via Ryans Road, Balakian's Hill, up the hill on the Eltham side, Bird Street, Silver Street and thence to Diamond Street. A foot track led from near the top of Balakian's Hill and another from Highpoint Crescent to the gully at the bottom of Silver Street, thence along Inez Avenue. The track then led across a short corner of the property then owned by the three Misses O'Callaghan, to get on to Diamond Street. Two other foot tracks from Scenic Crescent to Diamond Street led across the property of the Misses O'Callaghan, one straight down the hill, another following the banks of Diamond Creek. Although these foot travellers did no obvious harm, the Misses O'Callaghan began to be resentful of them and attempted to stop them.

In fact, the property owned by the Misses O'Callaghan in the Shire of Eltham was the curse of many of the residents of Eltham North as it effectively blocked a convenient access route to the area. At different times, the owners were approached by residents in regard to access roads or tracks; also Cr. Harmer, President of the Shire of Eltham, who lived in Bolton Street near the railway, interviewed them for this purpose. The Trustees of the Judge Book Homes across Diamond Creek also tried to purchase the property.

The three Misses O'Callaghan lived in an attractive old two storey house of hand made red bricks and slate roof, similar too and built about the same time as Shillinglaw Cottage. Only one sister was seen regularly pottering around Diamond Street or shopping in Eltham. Their property was a large cleared area of mostly arable land, but no farming had been done there for many years except that the old ladies kept a few chooks and cows, and the whole place became neglected and forlorn. But still, the long grassy slopes interspersed by patches of gorse and topped by a belt of gum trees, were a delight to the eyes. Eventually two of the old ladies died within a short time of each other, and only one was left.

About this time a young solicitor, Mr. Brian Smyth, came to live in the lovely mud brick house on the banks of Diamond Creek, below the O'Callaghan property and after a while he began to act on behalf of Miss O'Callaghan. For many years it had been half known, but now began to be more fully realised, that when the last O'Callaghan died the property would be handed to the Catholic Church and it was for this reason that the Misses O'Callaghan could not negotiate with anyone else. When the last Miss O'Callaghan became so feeble that she could not look after herself she went to a nursing home in Greensborough where she died a few months later.

The charming old O'Callaghan house had been neglected for many years and needed some structural and general repairs. Whether it could or could not have been repaired is problematical for the fact was that it was demolished and this was the worst and least publicised act of vandalism ever known in this area.

A section of about ten acres was then separated from the estate and this became the property of Mr. Smyth. Now,

unfortunately enough, Mr.Smyth's new property abutted on the end of Inez Avenue where the foot track crossed to Diamond Street. A foot bridge led across a ditch here. Mr.Smyth had constructed a wire fence which crossed the track and before long, someone cut some of these wires. The fence was repaired and for good measure the footbridge destroyed. Some of the residents in Inez Avenue now became thoroughly angry and they rebuilt the foot bridge. But, the owner, angrier still, sent in a bull dozer which completely demolished the rebuilt bridge and built up a mound of earth over the track at the end of Inez Avenue.

It was now felt that some stronger action was necessary, and the residents of Inez Avenue and Kerrie Crescent arranged for some councillors from the Shire of Eltham to meet them in Inez Avenue to discuss the matter. Some residents of Ryans Road were told of this meeting and they spent some time talking to many residents in Eltham North, who might be interested.

And so it came to pass that when the three Eltham Councillors came, expecting to meet three or four, they had quite a surprise, for they found there not only a dozen ratepayers from the Shire of Eltham but Cr.Colclough, Shire President, and Cr.MacKenzie of Eltham North and about fifty other people from Eltham North. It was a cold but fine winters morning and the gully where they met was sodden with water. Everyone tramped around and talked and got their feet wet.

All ratepayers present wanted the Shire Council of Eltham to compulsorily acquire the land for the foot track from Inez Avenue to Diamond Street and the reason for this could be clearly seen. The councillors, whilst promising to do what they could, would not commit themselves. Mr.Christoffersen of Ramptons Road, who unfortunately arrived after the meeting was over, submitted the most original idea when he said that as an underground drain was needed, the best idea was to make it seven or eight feet high and then the people could pass under the land and not over it!

As is now known, the compulsory acquisition was not accomplished but some good did come of the meeting. At that time Kerrie Crescent was not a through road and the Eltham Council now formed up this road to connect Diamond Street to Bolton Street making a much shorter route from Ryans Road to Eltham. The Eltham Shire also put in an underground drainage channel from Silver Street to Diamond Creek (but it was so small that even Mr.Christoffersen could not crawl along it). Later the section of road was formed up between Highpoint Crescent and Silver Street in the Shire of Diamond Valley.

A few years later, a further attempt was made to acquire the right of way from Inez Avenue to Diamond Street. On this occasion, Mr.Beasley who lived in Inez Avenue, lodged an application to the Board of Works. Attended by a solicitor, Mr.Beasley appeared in the City of Melbourne before the Commissioners of the Board of Works. He was supported by a petition of ratepayers of Eltham and Eltham North. The Shire Engineer of Eltham, Mr.McDonald, attended. Mr.Beasley was opposed by the Sisters of Charity who were now in possession of the O'Callaghan Estate. No charity was displayed and the application was rejected.

At the bottom of Scenic Crescent where Mr. Jack lived, the situation had deteriorated. The former farmland along the Eltham North side of Diamond Creek had for many years been used by Boy Scouts as a camping ground, and they had constructed a footbridge across the creek to Railway Parade. It was a simple bridge consisting of two long stringers, with the ends resting on the earth banks, and the footway made of boards nailed on. The Jack's and some other residents made good use of it and kept it in repair, until as successive floods passed over it, the bank on which the stringers rested, began to subside. The Scout Bridge then acquired such a slant as to become almost impassable. Also there had been some earthworks and a fence constructed on the Eltham bank and the way became difficult. The final blow was then another flood swept most of the bridge away. Mr. Jack now industriously constructed another shorter and lower bridge on a different side, but this became even more subject to flood damage.

Almost since the Shire of Diamond Valley came into being, private individuals, shire councillors, shire engineers and Uncle Tom Cobleigh and all have tramped up and down Diamond Creek seeking a suitable place where some kind of bridge can be constructed across Diamond Creek to provide more convenient access to Eltham Heights Estate, but no one has yet been able to do it. Endless representations have been made to Shire Councillors, land-holders the sisters O'Callaghan, the Sisters of Charity, and perhaps even to Old Nick himself, but if ever anyone wanted to find a prime instance of muddle and bingle and pigheaded stubbornness they would be hard put to find a better place than around that part of Diamond Creek.

The residents of Scenic Crescent are the most affected by this lack of access across the Diamond Creek and as more people come to live there, the problem becomes worse. Committees have formed and at one stage, the Eltham Council actually agreed to construct a footbridge. It was reported in the Diamond Valley News that the Eltham Shire engineer estimated the cost of construction at nearly \$40,000. This obvious overstatement enabled the Eltham Council to back down on the project. In subsequent years the Eltham Council constructed two footbridges across the Diamond Creek, one near the Eltham High School and one near Bridge Street; the total costs of both of these was considerably less than \$40,000.

The old Scout Bridge lasted a long time. It cost nothing. It was constructed by voluntary labour. But the landowners of that time did not object to leaving it there. The situation is now that the Council will not build a bridge because of the cost. The landowners along the creek do not want it built and finally, the people who want it, will not combine together to construct it themselves. The result anyway is NO BRIDGE. Well, not exactly, a single plank crosses the creek close to the site of the old Scout Bridge. Agile children and mountain goats go across it, but what are needed are a couple of old telegraph poles and the Shire President's front fence and there you have the ideal cheap convenient footbridge!

About fifteen years ago the P.M.G. became aware that there was a place called Eltham North and commenced installing new telephone cables, some strung from post to post, and some buried underground. Prior to this, it was impossible to have a 'phone installed and some residents had to wait years for one.

Also about this time the population explosion had begun to make itself felt in Eltham North and more houses were being built. Along Ryans Road and Bolten Street, the new Sunrise Estate was sub-divided and in this instance gravel roads formed.

Some confusion now began, between this Bolten Street in Diamond Valley and the Bolton Street only a short distance away in Eltham. So, on representation from the Progress Association, Diamond Valley Bolten was changed to become Progress Road. Also, but a little later, the section of Bolton Street in Eltham between the Diamond Valley-Eltham boundary and the railway, was renamed Ryans Road so that Ryans Road now extended from the railway to Diamond Creek.

One of the features of all the homes in Eltham North was the water tanks decorating the exterior of each dwelling. During the dry summer months the water situation became pretty grim for some people, and water had to be purchased and delivered by tanker. This cost about \$10 a thousand gallons, the charge being for cartage. And so it was inevitable that the Progress Association should concern itself with the water problem. For years it carried on agitation and correspondence, but it was not until the Diamond Valley Shire came into being that any promising development took place. It must be acknowledged with unstinted gratitude to the late Mr. Tindall and the Committee of the Eltham North Progress Association did a wonderful job on this project. But the seemingly insuperable problems were overcome, and at last the great day came when the excavators set to work digging the trenches and laying the large water pipes from the aqueduct, along Ryans Road and thence gradually along other roads. It was in the middle of a hot dry summer that the water first coursed through the pipes. The Board of Works continued the pipes along Ryans Road till they connected with the Eltham water pipes and so Eltham also benefitted from the industry of those at Eltham North.

Prior to the coming of the water most of the Eltham Heights Estate remained a roadless wilderness and on the 3rd March, 1965 a disastrous bush fire raged through the estate. It was believed to have started on the north side of Orchard Avenue near Ryans Road, and was first noticed and reported by the "girl on the motor scooter" who fortnightly collected the milk money.

There was some delay while the girl tried to contact the Fire Brigade and in the meantime, the fire raced down the hills of the Eltham Heights Estate towards the Diamond Creek. There were then few houses there and only a rough bush road along the ridge near Scenic Crescent. The fire jumped the Diamond Creek near the Judge Book Village, not then as large as now, which was evacuated, but it was stopped there. At two houses along Scenic Crescent the fire came right up to the walls and Mr. Jack's home right at the bottom in the middle of the conflagration was saved by the large cleared area around it, which had been energetically maintained by Mr. Jack for many years. The village was undamaged but some of the lovely gums near the creek eventually died.

It looked as though this began to be the end of it, when suddenly a strong south wind came blustering up and the dying flames roared to a new life up the hills to the north of the Estate, up through the bush with the thickest undergrowth, up towards the Glen Park Road, where there were a large number of old weatherboard houses. Burning ashes were carried as far as Research and Diamond Creek and were thought to have caused a fire at Wattle Glen. The fire was stopped at Glen Park Road, though small areas were burnt

of Eltham North were burned to death. Fifteen houses were destroyed in this area. The fire brigades had a hard day and both the Regional Officer, Mr.Arthur McPhan, and the Eltham Fire Brigade Captain, Mr.Gaston, reported then that though they had fought worse fires, none was in such appalling conditions.

There was considerable speculation as to the cause of this fire. Many thought it was caused by the sun magnified through a broken bottle, but the Fire Brigade members believed it was deliberately lit by a diabolical device of matches. They had found many such scattered throughout the area. Further, at a later time a man had been seen throwing pieces of burning paper from a car, but a road blockage by police and fire brigades failed to catch him. An enquiry held into the cause of the fire established that there was no conclusive proof of origin.

It was a terrible time of disaster and despair, and the following extracts from an account written at the time show this vividly:

March 3rd (Ash Wednesday)... "the fire siren sent, and on looking out, a volume of smoke was gushing upwards at the back of our place. It became more intense, blacker and more yellow, and spread down towards the valley more and more quickly. This was about 12 o'clock. Fire carts and volunteers, a tanker and more volunteers arrived. Another siren went, then a Metropolitan Fire truck arrived with bells ringing. The smoke was spreading...."

"At the height of the blaze a helicopter and a light plane flew over." it has just come over the air that the Eltham North fire has been controlled after burning in three hours about 4 square miles(?) of forest country..." (Note: 1 sq. mile would be nearer to it). "One of the fire carts has just now gone down to Eltham, time 3.45pm" "Cars ran up and down the roads all day, a bulldozer was at work behind us, and the afternoon grew warmer to 103° F..."

March 4th. "Hot eastern northerlies stirred up at 9.30 am and by 10.00 am the fire siren had gone and a fire cart raced up the hill. Over the radio I heard a fire had broken out in the Eltham North area again, but later it was under control. Another fire occurred near Research"..

March 6th. "Light rain began falling"... "Boys are playing firecarts, rushing around with a billy cart and emitting long siren screams".. "The burnt patches are still giving off patches of smoke".. "People trying to telephone us have been met with a recorded voice saying the line was too busy, but we have been able to make outward calls".....

March 7th Sunday: " Today is the sixth successive day of total fire ban".. Cars have been coming up the hill all day, sightseeing".....

March 11th. "Today is a terrible day. Fires burning since 1.30. One near Research died down, and then seemed to flare up towards the Plenty River. It roared downstream along the river to Greensborough in fifteen minutes. It burnt all the hills around Partington's Flat, jumped the Plenty River and commenced burning the backs of shops in the Main Street, Greensborough, where the owners were serving customers, not even knowing the fires were there..." "Another fire the same day, from near Research, went around the back of Eltham, crossed Mt. Pleasant Road, down to Laughing Waters where ten houses were burnt, then crossed the river to Pound Bend at Warrandyte.

"We did not sleep much that night, with fires almost all around us, hoping that there would be no change of wind, or even a new fire, to bring them closer.."

A few days later: "Today we walked along Scenic Crescent, down to Diamond Creek and found the place silent and in utter desolation, with blackened tree trunks standing starkly.." "At Greensborough, the once-green hills and gullies are also black and silent.." "Today at the Eltham Railway Station the porters were playing hockey with broomsticks but elsewhere, people, everywhere, are out in the streets talking about it all.." "The Diamond Valley News is now filled with causes and remedies, and the need for access roads, clearing and water supplies.."

During the next year, 1966, there were practically no bush fires anywhere. It was a good year with good rains. In fact, on one occasion, the drains in the newly constructed sub-way under the Eltham Station became blocked and the sub-way completely filled up with water. A new job was found for the Eltham Fire Brigade who pumped it out. In this year decimal currency was introduced.

1967 was a good year for Eltham North, but also a bad one. It was good because that year the new water main was laid along Ryans Road. It was bad because it was a very dry summer and there were more bush-fires. Indeed it was a very dry summer and it subsequently proved to be the driest year on record, in the 113 years since records were commenced. The year the water came there were also water restrictions and that year Melbourne gardeners had to cease using hoses and try their hand at bucketing.

Tanks were running very low and the Diamond Valley News reported water shortages in Eltham North. Private tankers were busy carting water and even the Council had a tanker supplying water throughout the Shire.

During February the fire sirens kept everybody on their toes going almost every day and on some days two or three times. But all the fires were quickly controlled. At one time there were seven consecutive days of total fire ban and one night was the HOTTEST FOR TWENTY FIVE YEARS. A shed was burnt but the house saved at Eltham North.

water commenced flowing in the new main at Eltham North at the end of January and people along Ryans Road, with their tongues hanging out gasping for water, could not get their pipes connected for two days because of total fire bans which would not let the welders work. The fire sirens continued almost daily during March and in the early part of the month there were several fires in the Sunrise Estate area. At 4:30 pm on March 23rd a great orange ball of flame rose in the air from Weidlich Road. Fire sirens were going and soon brigades from Eltham, Diamond Creek, Plenty and Metropolitan were on the job.

This turned out to be two fires at once, both of which had obviously been deliberately lit at the one point on both sides of Weidlich Road, about 200 yards from the Sunrise Estate. One spread across the open grass paddocks of the old Weidlich Estate and the other ran through the open forest towards Ramptons Road; at this time there were few houses in this area and no houses were lost. When extinguished by the combined brigades it had burnt out nearly one hundred acres.

1968: Despite the extremely hot dry conditions and the numerous small fires, there were no major outbreaks in the Diamond Valley this year. Instead, the arsonists appeared in the Dandenongs where there were a number of terrible conflagrations attended by up to sixty fire tankers. The Dandenong fires, most believed to be deliberately lit, continued several summers.

But the Diamond Valley was to take one more terrible beating and this happened too close to Eltham North for comfort. While the younger men went off to fight it the older men and the women congregated along the hills watching the fire and hoping there would not be a change in the wind to bring it to Eltham North.

On the morning of 9th January, 1969 a fire commenced on the outskirts of Diamond Creek township and raced towards Research. It could not be stopped, continued on, spreading out to Panton Hill, Warrandyte and Laughing Waters. There were actually three separate fires- at Diamond Creek, Reynolds Road Research and South Warrandyte which eventually linked up together, the fire raging through an area where there were no water mains and practically all water had to be carried in by tankers. At the height of the fires it was estimated there were 2,000 firemen and volunteers. Police had great difficulty blocking off crowds of sightseers.

From Eltham North could be seen great bursts of black and apricot smoke and flame which indicated houses going up. The fires burnt electricity poles and power was cut off in the area. This also affected the electric pumps which supplied water to Eltham North, and for five hours, only a few who had kept their tanks had any water and the power was cut off also. The next day the townships were full of cars and people, and relief stations were set up and fire relief funds were raised. Again a helicopter flew over. Fire carts were rushing around putting out occasional leftover fires.

The daily newspapers had nothing to say about it at all- it happened at the weekend and it was left to the Diamond Valley News to give a reasonably full report:

Losses were 68 homes and businesses destroyed, being

29 at Research,
12 at Diamond Creek,
8 at Panton Hill,
6 at Eltham,
4 at Wattle Glen
5 at North Warrandyte and
4 at West Warrandyte.

Professor Osborne's historic old home at Kangaroo Ground, then occupied by his daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. (Cr.) Pelling, was among those destroyed. Mr. Pelling only saved himself by sharing his dam with his prize bull.

Three wooden bridges on the Hurstbridge line were burnt and for a long time the railways ran a bus service from Eltham.

The fire at Eltham North in 1965 caused distress and anguish to many, but as happened before, from disaster came action. This rousing of a riding spurred the Diamond Valley Council to a degree of activity it would have taken years to accomplish otherwise. A Country Roads Board grant was obtained and a long ago surveyed road (later to be called Progress Road) from Ryans Road to Glen Park Road was cleared and formed up (though the section of Progress Road between Glen Park Road and Wattletree Road was not completed. This part has a foot track known locally as the "goat track.") Later came Elm Crescent, to be

then continued into and along Scenic Crescent, down to Jack's house near the Diamond Creek. Mr. Cope had had bulldozed, in formidable terrain, the section of Scenic Crescent from Ryans Road to his house. The cost of this was paid by landowners along this road.

A series of awful ruts and potholes called Highpoint Crescent was formed up, and this joined on to Silver Street to make another shorter way to Eltham. Allison Crescent, Sherbrooke Street and more of Scenic Crescent became apparent as rather rough roads.

After the 1967 fire at Weidlich Road, the Fire Brigade complained so much about the terrible state of Ramptons Road that this too was reformed and graded, the first time since it had been constructed. At about this time, the Eltham Council tore down a great number of trees in this area and constructed a wide fire-break along the Shire boundary, from Karingal Drive to the O'Callaghan Estate.

There are now many residents in fine new houses who have not seen or been in a bush fire and even cannot believe that it ever happened in Eltham North; or, if it did that it will not happen again. Why? Now there is water, access roads everywhere, modern fire fighting tankers and brigades! How can it happen again?

Don't you believe it! It can happen again!

Most of us who came to live here, did so, because we like the bushland surroundings, the clean air, and the absence of industrial and commercial areas. But the very bush we like so much is our greatest danger. No one knows more than the Diamond Valley Council that the Shire generally is regarded as an extreme bush fire danger area. Every year now, the Council sends notices to owners of undeveloped blocks: "Get your land cleared before Christmas! Cut down grass and undergrowth to the height of three inches! If you can't do it yourself, here is a list of contractors! If you don't do it, the Council will do it at your expense."

The conservationists and bush lovers do not care for these instructions at all. They see the bush flora being gradually destroyed. Already the indigenous native wild flowers and orchids are becoming rare and hard to find. Has anyone seen one of those large potato orchids lately? Where have those masses of triggers, dark-eyed susans and everlastings gone?

But worse still, a hot dry summer of shrivelled leaves and long dry grasses, a strong north wind, a roaring billowing, flaming bush fire raging through our properties.... "Where have all the houses gone?!!! "

But other things happened in Eltham North, as Mrs. M. Tindall recorded:

"Persuing memory lane, Eltham North once had snow in June, 1951. Watching the flakes fall through the window, one seemed to be in another land. All the domestic animals including Tilly Goat came into the kitchen for warmth. "It's your Irish ancestry showing", said my husband disapprovingly. Outside the scene was incredibly beautiful, and eerily silent. A thick white blanket of snow, with "Christmas" trees glistening in the sunlight! What fun the children had throwing snowballs and making the inevitable snowmen."

One of the oldest houses still extant in Eltham North is at the head of Ramptons Road, nearly opposite Christoffersens. This poor old dirty, weary house, with flaking paint and rusty roof, was owned by a check farmer, Mr. Rampton, and the track which led to his house from what is now called Karingal Drive, inevitably became known as Ramptons Road.

Following the course of Karingal Drive there is an unnamed watercourse, which is controlled by the Board of Works (WOW!) and roadways cannot be constructed across this Bow-wow Creek unless to B.O.W. specifications. Entry to Ramptons Road was through a locked gate, then across Bow-wow Creek by a solidly constructed trestle bridge. At some stage, the track to Ramptons was properly formed up with concrete pipe culverts. Eventually the locked gate was removed and the road continued by a tortuous S bend to Ryans Road.

By about 1955 the trestle bridge had fallen into such disrepair that it now could not be used, and was in fact known as the "Broken Bridge". Ramptons Road itself was almost impassable with washaways anyway.

After a flat refusal by the Heidelberg Council to repair the bridge, as it was on a private road, the men residing in the five or six houses then in Ramptons Road, raised the necessary funds and repaired it themselves. They cut three feet off the split tops of the supporting posts, laid three heavy stringers across and then made a roadway of old railway sleepers.

Here their industry ran flat, the sleepers were not spiked to the stringers. They stayed in position when wet, but during the dry summers came apart and some had a habit of sliding off. The bridge had no railings and a crossing was likely to be hazardous.

At this time Ramptons was a lovely quiet bush road, bordered and overhung by gum trees. In July, hundreds of Cootamundra wattles turned it into a blaze of golden glory. In the spring, the upper part was covered by thousands of yellow everlastings and white freezias, and many other native flowers and orchids.

About 1960 a large tract of land bordering Ramptons Road was subdivided and an unsealed road, Warringah Crescent, was constructed. Gradually, thus more people came to live in the Ramptons Road area, though slowly, as there were then no water, electricity or telephone.

When the P.M.G. decided to do something about this, a mug driver of a truck laden with poles commenced to cross the old narrow bridge. He didn't. Some of the sleepers slid off and the truck ended up in Bow-wow Creek. It was quite a performance, and an even greater one getting the truck out.

But now the Council decided to do something. Heidelberg had, by this time, been supplanted by Diamond Valley. A huge barricade of old P.M.G. poles, white painted barriers and flashing yellow lights were erected. It was almost larger and stronger than the bridge itself. But after a week or two, some Council employees actually did replace the broken sleepers and spiked them on, and the bridge was re-opened. But for months afterwards the Council hotly debated whether the bridge should be repaired or replaced by the P.M.G., the Board of Works, the Diamond Valley Council, or the Governor of Victoria. But in the end, predictably, the Council was true to form and did nothing more.

And now new roads were constructed, some even bitumenised, between Ramptons Road and Weidlich Roads, and more houses were built in the area. Water, electricity and telephones got there somehow, and as the old bridge became more dilapidated with greater use, the Council erected signs "Load limit half ton" which were largely ignored.

The residents kept on prodding the Council to "do something." In 1960 six residents repaired the bridge themselves. In 1976 sixty residents would not stir themselves to do anything, and so at last the Council "did something".

In February, 1977 they closed the bridge. Again. Permanently. Well, not altogether. The bridge was never again used. But one of the functions of Local Government is to keep roads and bridges open to traffic. Having closed the bridge the Council was now bound to "do something" and in 1978 the old wooden bridge was removed and a concrete tunnel constructed. As this is another access road from Ryans Road to Karingal Drive, the residents in Ramptons Road can now expect their share of dust!

Up to about five years ago, it was thought that the Ramptons Road area was up in the woop woops, a rotten old bridge, a deeply rutted road, a few tumbledown houses. But now it is almost unrecognisable. With almost every convenience, new houses everywhere, even some bitumen roads, and wonder of wonders, the first part of Eltham North to be seweraged.

Over the border, in the Shire of Eltham, a narrow bridge and a concrete dam across Bow-wow Creek had been constructed many years ago by Mr. Bernard Smith, and this area became a haven for native birds.

In 1973 the area between the Ramptons Road Bridge and the shire boundary became subdivided and this became of some concern to Mrs. Rosemary Adams of Warringah Crescent. In early 1974 she presented interesting listings of birds and native plants of this area and printed in Eltham North News. She complained about tree destruction on new roads and sullage of Bow-wow Creek. She also made attempts to interest the owners of the land; the D.V. Council and the State Government to preserve this area.

This was all very commendable, with, however, no result. Mrs. Adams could not know that to put her own house where it is, there was terrific destruction of trees during construction of Warringah Crescent and along the fire break made by the Shire of Eltham to the boundary.

In the Bow-wow Creek and Mr. Smith's dam there is considerable growth of bulrushes. Recent experiments in Europe have proved that bulrushes assimilate pollution and effluent, causing cleansing of waters. Br. Bernard Smith has recently renewed the fence around his private sanctuary, and here at least, the bird life remains relatively undisturbed.

Once upon a time, a watercourse much the same as Bow-wow Creek, ran down the place where Swanston Street, Melbourne is now. It may be hoped that even in a hundred years time, Karingal Drive will not look like Swanston Street, but the developers, the Councils and the Board of Works are trying.

The Bow-wow Creek discharges into Diamond Creek below Bridge Street. Of it's upper reaches, there are five branches. The one from Briar Hill, beside Sherbourne Road, was the first to go about ten years ago. This once pleasant little creek now runs underground in a concrete pipe.

About the time the Heidelberg Council bitumenised their section of Karingal Drive, the one from Mountainview Road went underground in drainage pipes and this was continued by the Board of works along Karingal Drive to just past where the kindergarten was built.

Only recently the other uppermost branch, along St.Helena Road, and the branch which commences at St.Clems Street, and proceeds through the Weidlich Estate have been partly undergrounded. Another branch ran down the hill following Ramptons Road. Unknown to newer residents, sheets of water three feet deep and a hundred yards wide, following heavy rains, have been observed coursing down Ramptons Road and St.Clems and Weidlich gully. And now there has been further burrowing for the new crossing for Weidlich Road.

The only native animals left are possums and bats; the native undergrowth which provides food and shelter and nesting places for native birds is nearly all destroyed. This once lovely watercourse, with meandering paths, is going, going. How soon will it be gone?

About fifteen years ago a man was travelling along Karingal Drive on a winters morning after heavy rains. There was a heavy fog and near Sherbourne Road he discerned, in the half light, a mystifying object resting in the bed of Bow-wow Creek. It appeared to be a white faintly luminous ball about 20 feet in diameter. The traveller stopped in amazement and with wild thoughts of UFO's, and fears of the unknown, he moved closer to examine it.

It was quite an anti-climax to discover it was a ball of soap bubbles; water pouring over Smith's dam had caused foam to form and a very faint night breeze had gathered it together and wafted it downstream in this form. The traveller considered himself fortunate to have seen this remarkable object, for it could not happen like that often, perhaps never again. But he did ruminate that this could be a sign. This ball had formed from the effluent of newly built houses- was this a sign of the beginning of the end?

It was thought that the oldest house still extant in Eltham North was that formerly owned by Mr.Weidlich located on the high side of Weidlich Road near the creek. Up to a few years ago, this house was discernable from the road but partly hidden by trees. Alas! Poor Weidlich. The house is gone. The old farm sheds in the gully have only recently been demolished, and the old fences of hand made posts and rails, a lost art of the old bushmen with keen eyes and strong steady hands, have almost all gone.

The government road branched off from Weidlich's farm road, to become Progress Road. Some consternation was caused with this when the Board of Works, ignoring pleas by conservationists, ran a water pipe along it, rooting up trees wherever possible (so it seemed) but it was left to the Country Roads Board to throw a spanner in the works. Suddenly in 1976, bulldozers commenced work, other machinery moved in and before long, this section of Progress Road, became a wide treeless bitumenised road. At the junction of Ryans Road, such a vast excavation was made that some people thought it was the site for the new Eltham North Swimming Pool.

This first effort at improving the awful Eltham North government roads happened by accident. The Country Roads Board had the funds to improve Karingal Drive, but the Eltham and Diamond Valley Councils dithered for so long on how it should be done, that the C.R.B. ran out of time and patience and set to work on the next project that they had on their list: which happened to be Progress Road!

But if Progress Road was formed up and bitumenised with celerity, what about that temporary Eltham North State School?

One week there was a bulldozer levelling the ground. Next week there were, what looked like a lot of large crates, strewn all over the place.

The next week the crates were in orderly rows.

Somebody must have got hold of that genie from Arabia again. Who else could have changed a lot of old crates into a school full of kids? !!!

Doubt exists as to how St.Clems Road received it's strange name. It has a number of curves and has now become rough and rutted. At the end is the house of the Evans who lived there for many years. Hardy people, who most of their lives walked along the bush tracks to and from Eltham. Just past Evans' house, the road originally crossed a wooden bridge over this arm of the Bow-wow Creek. This too has long been a "broken bridge" but some of it's timbers are still standing.

Also on a property here there is a grassy slope overlooking an enchanting lily pool with a background of bright green grassy swampland.

Mr.Evans said that when he and his wife first came to Eltham North it was a very pretty creek, but a piggery was established on the opposite hillside and sullage from there washed into the creek, turning it into a kind of swamp. But the creek here is still quite fascinating, consisting of meandering channels with torpid waters, but crisscrossed by many slanting tree trunks. Will this also, this delightful glade, become rubbish strewn, hacked about and even totally destroyed by the developers.

But with the formation of the Shire of Diamond Valley, a marked change came to Eltham North. Council trucks came weekly to collect nightsoil and garbage. Almost every square foot of some people blocks had been dug up as burial grounds and the amount of old cans and rubbish that littered almost every yard had to be seen to be believed. Diamond Valley Council made a first clearance with trucks, taking everything; and now this is done about once a year in skips. As a result Eltham North has become rather more respectable.

Further, a large council grader appeared at fairly frequent intervals and worked overmost of the roads. But, as usual, in the summer months they say the pilots in the aircraft find their way to Tulla by noting the large clouds of dust hanging over Eltham North! Down below, the people live in air-conditioned sealed houses and only venture outside in gas masks; or whiz about, nearly suffocated in sealed steel boxes.

Prodded on by the Progress Association and Cr.Colcough, the Diamond Valley Council now began to make some improvements to RyansRoad. The section between Progress Road and Highpoint Crescent, which was no more than a narrow up and down dingle, was widened and levelled a little better, with white painted posts with reflectors added for decorations. Other adornments such as street names and road signs were added to make people realise that it really was a road and not merely and wholly, an irritation.

Regrettably, the name "Balakian's Hill" fell into disuse as more residents meant more taxis, and the taxi drivers began to refer to it as "The Big Dipper". This steep hill has quite some character, though by no means pleasant, either for drivers or nearby residents. Vehicles going up may be suddenly seen sliding backwards to the bottom. Some vehicles which start slowly from the top find themselves going so fast at the bottom that women passengers in the back seat have fainted from lack of air. Others have started from the bottom and arrived at the top of the hill with the driver having slipped into the back seat.

The 'going up' side, on the left hand side of the hill, consists of soft soil and all efforts by the Council to improve it come to nothing. Those who are aware of this come up the hill on the right side of the road, and this is rather disconcerting to those coming down who don't know of it.

Drivers trying to come uphill on the left side find themselves in difficulties. In the wet weather, the road becomes a slippery bog, and some cars manage to find themselves stuck in the gutter. In the dry weather the left side, especially at the bottom, often becomes axle deep in dust and it is quite a sight to see cars trying to plough up the hill with a great bow wave of fine dust issuing from the sides. About three years ago the hill was widened about three feet and this improved the traffic flow. It is now possible for cars to pass on the hill.

With the building boom going on, more and more big trucks with drivers new to the area appear on the scene. They look at their maps and see this lovely straight road, and do not find out what is in store for them until they get there. The hill is often blocked with trucks stuck in the gutter and bricks, tiles and concrete are often strewn across the road. And the dust kicked up by these vehicles is unbelievable.

To the present day, Eltham North has retained an air of country charm with it's acres of wild bush lands, and there are very few, if any, properties without gum trees and native shrubs. But more and more, many of these are being uprooted to make way for new houses. Many owners simply do not realise that the heavy watering needed for neat respectable lawns means the destruction of the delicate wild flowers and orchids native to the area.

Victoria has a peculiar system of "government" and "private roads", which gives rise to considerable worries, argument and litigation. Eltham North has had, and will have, it's fair share of these. And there is some confusion amongst residents and councillors regarding their "rights" in regard to these roads.

With the "private roads", where the resident is compelled to pay part of the construction costs, it is right and proper that the residents should have their say in how the construction should be done. And they should determinedly fight to see that these roadways should retain a park-like appearance with the preservation of trees and shrubs.

But the "government roads" are a different proposition. These are main arterial roads carrying heavy traffic. The full cost of construction is the business of the Country Roads Board, and it is the responsibility of the surveyors and engineers to make the roads fit for this traffic. These roads have to stand heavy traffic for a very long time. These roads are not public parks, and the Country Roads Board is not concerned with saving trees, but with providing proper drainage and clear visibility, in addition to well graded and enduring roads. It is most improper and a form of impertinence for residents to interfere with and demand preservation of trees from the road engineers, who know their job, and will do it much better without interference.

However, once the roadway or pavement, as it is technically known, is completed, Councils are free to plant trees along the footpaths. If tended by residents they will grow quickly. In twenty years a gum tree will grow 30 feet with a base of one foot.

The old gravel roads, picturesquely meandering through the roadside trees were alright in the horse and buggy days, but the fast heavy modern traffic has turned these roads into a nightmare for those living along them, especially in the dry summer months, when the dust clouds rise up and over the houses and trees making housework an abominable duty and road travel a curse.

Even without much road construction the trees along the roads are gradually going with S.E.C. poles and underground water and gas pipes. Along Ryans Road there was further devastation with the laying of a second and much larger gas main.

From time to time there have been protests about the state of Ryans Road, mostly from small groups of residents. Protests have been lodged with Councils, Roads Boards and Governments. Some results have come from this. It is promised that after the Progress-Weidlich Road section is completed, that Ryans Road will follow, first between the Railway and Progress Roads and then later the rest of it.

Following a count of traffic on Ryans Road, the report was that the volume of traffic was not sufficient for the high construction cost; but that construction might be commenced in 1980.

There have been considerable talks and correspondence with the Diamond Valley Council about construction of private roads and it appears that the form most favoured is that to be found at Greenhills. However, few, if any, residents want to pay for the roads themselves and at any rate can see no sense in doing the side roads when the main roads remain unmade.

The South East Riding in the Shire of Diamond Valley, known as Eltham North, is a rather unusual kind of a place. People living in part of it find that they live in Eltham North South East/West and could you find anything stranger than that!

Another odd thing about it is that it is almost entirely a residential area, there being only one shop on the extreme north edge.

Although not in mountain country, there are not many flat parts in the area and this makes some problems for house and road builders. The soil, if any, is generally very poor and this has resulted in the greater part of it having remained native tree covered; and this very factor gives Eltham North a unique suburban character.

Up to about twenty years ago the greatest concentration of housing was in the Glen Park area, with an odd scattering of not more than one hundred houses over the rest of it. All of these were of weatherboard and fibro-cement. Older residents can now hardly believe it when they perceive the number of newer houses, many of brick, some two-storied, some with strange appearance that seem to have almost miraculously commenced to cover the countryside.

Eltham North was a kind of dead-end place, with unpainted houses, old shacks and rubbish strewn yards; but now almost all of this has gone.

This area of once-cheap land has suddenly blossomed into a high class, much sought after area with expensive properties set in beautiful bush surroundings.

A remarkable transformation from the era of the old cellar of hand made bricks recently discovered in Weidlich estate area, and the conveniences people now have may be compared with that old windmill here. There it still stands up on the hill over an old well, an old Australian iron windmill with vanes still rotating merrily, the last of it's kind in this modernised district.

There are still many improvements to be made at Eltham North, and the hopes and promises of the future are still to come. May we look forward still to a

ROUSING OF A RIDING.

June, 1978.

Eric Stephensen,
110 Ryans Road,
Eltham North.3095.