

Elsie Rose Beatrice Bolam, MBE

1879-1965

"I am Marysville's best advertisement, I came for a year and stayed for a generation."¹

Sister Elsie Bolam was in Marysville for over 40 years, almost all of them with her companion Sister Lesley MacGowan². Elsie Bolam owned Kerami from 1919 to the end of the 1920s, they left Marysville for just over 10 years, then returned to retire in their beloved town. Elsie Bolam was very active in the promotion of the town and she and Lesley provided Marysville's only medical service.

Elsie Bolam was born on 30 October, 1879³ in St Kilda to Ellen Marion Eve nee Gill and Thomas Bolam. Her father, Thomas was an Inspector General of Education. Thomas and Ellen's marriage was acrimonious with each one taking the other to court and ended with Thomas dying under suspicious circumstance in 1884⁴. Elsie was just 5 years old.

She did her nurse's training in Beechworth and Melbourne. In 1903⁵ Elsie, a nurse was living with her mother in High Street, Armadale. Her mother was the registrar of Births, Marriages and Deaths and when her mother took holidays Elsie deputized⁶. Her mother died in Marysville on 23 April 1928⁷ and is buried in the St Kilda cemetery.

With her nursing career in Melbourne growing it was not long before Elsie held important administrative posts in major Melbourne hospitals. Then in 1914 Elsie first came to Marysville to assist her friend Helena Brayshay at Kerami and was listed from this date on the Electoral Rolls as living in Marysville. Helena Brayshay died in 1919.

The Age, 9 Aug 1919

BRAYSHAY.—On the 8th August, at "Lancewood," Kew, Helena, the beloved friend of Elsie R. Bolam.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian, 4 Oct 1919

Miss Helena Brayshay, of Kerami, Marysville who died on August 8, left by her will, dated March 19, 1915; real estate valued at £3,030 and personal property valued at £832 to her sisters and relatives and to Elsie Bolam.



These two photos show the new bungalow on the left built in 1921 after Elsie Bolam bought the property.

It is likely that Elsie Bolam is with the dog and the other lady is Lesley MacGowan.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian, 17 July, 1920

Miss Elsie Bolam has purchased "Kerami," Marysville. The home is not new to her, as she was for some years associated there with the late Miss Brayshay. During the influenza epidemic at Healesville Miss Bolam assisted considerably in organising the emergency hospital, her training as a professional nurse enabling her to help the scheme through successfully. She also rendered useful patriotic service during the war period.

The Argus, 3 Sep 1919

KERAMI, Marysville, reopens 29th, beautifully situated, hot, cold baths, sewerred, gas, garage, petrol. Miss E. R. Bolam, manageress.

Table Talk, 3 Feb 1921

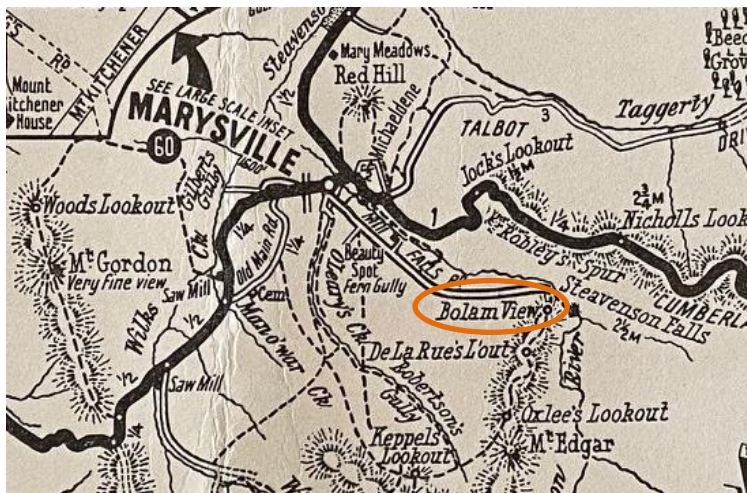
It was fortunate that the services of qualified nurses were available last week in the case of two accidents in the Marysville district. The nurses Misses Bolam and McGowan ably conduct the guest house "Kerami." On frequent occasions their assistance has been freely given, and many an unlucky person who has met with some misfortune has had reason to be grateful for the kindly attention and skilled service, of these ladies. The first accident happened on Saturday, January 22, when a

young rabbit shooter missed his sense of direction and riddled with duck-shot a motor car which was travelling on the road adjoining. The injured parties were the Rev. R. Allan Scott⁸ and his son. The car proceeded to Marysville where the pellets were extracted and the patients treated and put on the road to recovery from their unfortunate experience. On the following Monday an accident of a more serious nature occurred just outside Marysville when Mr. James Davies, secretary of the Commercial Travellers' Club, fractured his leg near the hip in a riding mishap. Miss Bolam gave first aid and accompanied the sufferer when he left in a car for Melbourne. Mr. Davies is now progressing favorably in a private hospital.

Naming of Bolam View

Elsie Bolam had followed her predecessors, Elizabeth Glover and Helena Brayshay as an active member of the Marysville Tourist and Progress Association. From the minutes of the General Meeting of the Marysville Tourist and Progress Association on 30 May 1921:

"Mr Oxlee informed meeting that he had found a place where a new and a splendid view could be obtained from Mt Edgar of Steavenson Falls. He produced a photograph of the view and it was his desire that this view or lookout be called "The Bolam View" in recognition of our worthy President Miss Bolam.



*From Broadbent's
Marysville & District
Map No 163 (1950s)*

"Mr Oxlee spoke at length of the capabilities possessed by Miss Bolam as a nurse and friend to all, everyone knew how good Miss Bolam had been to those in the village who had been ill, she was always available and ready to give help. District people were lucky to have such valuable services to those in need.

"Mr Oxlee then moved that we name this view "The Bolam View". Mr Elliot in seconding the motion, said he was pleased to see that some recognition had been shown to Miss Bolam as she was well worthy of having a view named after her.

"Mr De La Rue who was temporarily acting Chairman said that he heartily supported the motion before the chair, he knew how well Miss Bolam's services especially to those who [sic] ill were appreciated. There was not a week went by without someone was asking her advice or receiving attention. Marysville and District people were lucky to have such an able and capable person in their midst, it seemed to be a pleasure to her to attend those who were less fortunate. Mr Jellicoe heartily supported the motion.

"Mr Fred Barton who was inclined to be [illegible] did not think this view should be so named as it was not good enough for the person whom it was intended to be named after. Miss Bolam was well worthy of something better, however he would vote for the motion. After Mr Hanson, J Elliot and Misses Pitman had expressed their appreciation of the motion Mr De La Rue put the motion which was unanimously carried.

Miss Bolam in thanking the members present for the honour which they had done to her, said, that she was pleased to do whatever she could to assist anybody, it was a pleasure to her to think that her services to those who were ill were appreciated and she would continue so to do to the best of her ability, she specially thanked Mr Oxlee for his kindness." *from the Minutes*

Table Talk, 19 Jan 1922

Kerami

This picturesquely-situated mountain retreat maintains its prestige under the direction of Misses Bolam and McGowan⁹. The bungalow addition¹⁰ late last year to the accommodation, the extension of the dining-room, and other improvements have added greatly to the convenience and pleasure of patrons. The unique attractions of the forest and fern scenery on the road and in the vicinity of Marysville are each year receiving wider appreciation, and the admirable and up-to-date motor service is materially helping in the development of the district.

Table Talk, 22 Mar 1923

The popular hostesses of "Kerami," Marysville (Misses Bolam and McGowan) have decided this season to keep their picturesquely situated house open during the autumn and

winter months, in compliance with numerous requests by patrons who desire to enjoy the beautiful winter climate and picturesque surroundings of this salubrious district. Those who have not visited Marysville during the winter months have missed much of the pleasure to be enjoyed from the pleasant walks and the invigorating atmosphere at this time of the year.

Advertisement – Table Talk, 11 Oct 1923

"KERAMI" Marysville.

Under Vice-Regal Patronage. First-class Guest House in the Mountains. Unrivalled position. All modern conveniences, hot and cold water, garage, private sitting rooms if required. A.C.V. House. Best Australian Wines. Estab. 18 years.

OPEN During WINTER MONTHS MISSES BOLAM & MCGOWAN, 'Phone: 1, Marysville.

Table Talk, 18 Oct 1928

The Misses Bolam and MacGowan, of Kerami, Marysville, have disposed of their beautiful property to Mr and Mrs Ernest Robarts, of Nyora, Healesville. They are not leaving the district as they have purchased The Crossways, Marysville, as a country home.

Elsie extended Crossways in 1929 with a large room for the Tearooms, an idea of Elsie's to provide entertainment for the tourists and funds for the Tourist & Progress Association, half of the meal charges going to the Track Funds. The Cuzens Bros did the building work.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian, 30 Mar 1929

15 Years a Doctor Without Fees

WOMEN'S SELF-IMPOSED TASK

Without pecuniary reward Miss Elsie Bolam trained nurse has been unselfishly performing the functions of a doctor at Marysville for 15 years. Recently Mr Joe White of Dendy Street Brighton, presented her with an up-to-date casualty station at the back of her tea rooms, The Crossways.

There has never been a resident medical practitioner at Marysville. As there are no more than 700 people in the district at the height of the season and local folk are unusually healthy, a doctor would find it difficult to earn a living there all year round.

The nearest doctors are at Healesville, 35 miles from the town. Often they and the doctor at Alexandra 27 miles away are not available. It is therefore not surprising that the local residents and tourists often consult Miss Bolam. She recently treated seven serious casualties in one day.

Miss Bolam is an expert bone-setter, and has skilfully stitched many wounds. She is glad to be of service to the community but she thinks some organisation should pay the cost of her medical supplies and equipment. She says she has written to the Bush Nursing Association for financial support, but has been informed that her casualty station does not come within its jurisdiction – Melbourne "Herald".

With no doctor in Marysville it was Sister Bolam who attended to visitors and locals medical needs just as the nurses before her at Kerami had. In 1929 Joe White gave her an up-to-date casualty station at the back of her Crossways Tearooms. She was involved in the tragic death of Gwendoline Pitman in 1931 and appeared at the inquest.

Exactly what was happening at Kerami and with Elsie Bolam is confusing. It was reported that Elsie Bolam had sold Kerami to Ernest Robarts towards the end of 1928. Ernest Nathaniel Robarts was from Healesville, being a boy there on his parents farm "Nyora" and later was owner of this farm and guesthouse with his brother. He married in 1912 and was soon on the Healesville Shire Council, serving until 1928. Ernest gave his occupation as coach proprietor. Suffering ill health he was at Kerami from 1928 until 1930¹¹.

The Argus, 18 Nov 1930

APPLICATION for TRANSFER of an AUSTRALIAN WINE LICENCE-I, Ernest Nathaniel Robarts of Marysville, boarding house keeper the Holder of an Australian wine licence for "Kerami," at Marysville in the Evelyn Licensing District, and I, Elsie Rose Beatrice Bolam of Marysville herein give notice that, we will APPLY to the Licensing Court at Melbourne on Monday the 1st day of

December 1930 for the TRANSFER of the LICENCE to the said Elsie Rose Beatrice Bolam Dated the 14th of November, 1930.
ERNEST NATHANIEL ROBARTS ELSIE ROSE BEATRICE BOLAM
Cornwall, Anderson and ???art of 440 Little Collins street Melbourne, solicitors for the applicant.

The wine licence at Kerami was transferred back to Elsie Bolam in 1930 when she went back to help Robarts at Kerami and lived there. From 1930 Harold and Florence Cuzens were at The Crossways. Was Robarts still the owner of Kerami with Elsie Bolam manageress ? Had she sold The Crossways to the Cuzens? Kerami was still being advertised in early 1933 in the name of Bolam & MacGowan.

Elsie Bolam's enthusiasm for Marysville had seen her serve as President, Secretary, Vice-President¹², and Treasurer of the Marysville Tourist and Progress Association.

She was to the fore if there was an opening - wielding the scissors to re-open the Yarra Track east of the Cumberland in February 1924 and presenting the scissors to the Governor, Lord Somers to officially open the Acheron Way in January 1929.



Re-opening of the Yarra Track in 1924 involved local parliamentarians. Lesley and Elsie are together on the left.

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About this time Eric Dowdle was establishing his Mary guesthouse chain in Marysville. Marylands and Mary Lyn were up and running. In 1933 he purchased Kerami, built a new guesthouse further along the Woods Point Road on what had been part of Elsie Bolam's land and re-named it Mary Lodge.

The Argus, 14 Nov 1933

Permission to rebuild Kerami at Marysville for which there is a wine licence was granted on an application by J E Dowdle, the owner and licensee.
Plans were submitted.

Advertisement in The Argus, 10 Jan 1934

KERAMI Marysville's New Guest House - Every mod com private 9 hole golf links grass greens
H and C each room tariff £3/15/ per week Tel
1 ERIC DOWDLE prop.

Eric Dowdle sold the property after WWII and it reverted back to Kerami and in 1969 it burnt down.

Years later Joe White's original county house in Kerami Crescent was operated as Kerami Guesthouse. In 2023 this house is known as Kerami Manor and was rebuilt after the 2009 Fires.

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When, in mid-1933, Eric Dowdle purchased Kerami, Elsie and Lesley moved to Narbethong¹³ assisting Mary Ann Slater¹⁴ at the Black Spur Hotel. The Slaters bought the burnt out block in early 1932, Mary Ann Slater was then widowed in April and a new Hotel was built by the end of the year. Mary Ann certainly could do with some help and Elsie and Lesley needed a home. For a couple of years Elsie involved herself in the promotion of Narbethong and the Black Spur Hotel, re-establishing the Narbethong Public Hall committee in 1934.

The Argus, 11 Nov 1933

Picture Company Stranded on the Blacks' Spur

For the purpose of taking movies and still pictures of some lyrebirds known to be located somewhere on the Blacks' Spur, the "Guardian" photographer motored to that picturesque region on Sunday last. The car carrying all the camera gear broke down most stubbornly at an isolated point on the other

side of the mountain, and the picture unit was stranded till well into the night. By dint of much effort the party managed to reach the Narbethong Hotel, But, although no pictures were obtained and it was such a heavenly day, too the hospitality of Miss Bolam and Miss McGowan (who succeeded in finishing the Jigsaw puzzle started on Saturday) was greatly appreciated.

In 1934 Elsie Bolam and Lesley MacGowan left Marysville to live in the Prahran/ South Yarra area.

Herald, 13 Apr 1934

In Place of the Doctor

WHAT will they do for a doctor now that Miss Elsie Bolam has quitted the hill country for a city life? Marysville, which has a permanent population of 100 swelling to 2000 at holiday times, had the utmost confidence in her medical skill, though she was not a doctor, but a nurse, who had given up the profession to conduct a guest house. At all hours of the day and night she would be called on to render honorary first aid, for there is no medical practitioner in Marysville. Snake bites and sprained ankles, were her speciality. Doctors at Alexandra and Healesville to whom she sent on the patients, were fond of saying that she had left them nothing to do. So people began to call her the 'Florence Nightingale' of Marysville. For years she was honorary secretary of the Marysville Tourist Association, and it is largely owing to her efforts that the beauties of the district have been revealed to the world. Who has not heard of the snow revels at Marysville and the springtime freshness of its glens?

At the height of the depression Elsie found herself in financial difficulties.

The Age, 26 July 1934

DEEDS OF ASSIGNMENT

The estate of Elsie Rose Beatrice Bolam, housekeeper of Domain street South Yarra has been assigned to Mr M R M Smith in trust for creditors. The estimated liabilities are £673/9/6 and the estimated amount of property £1547/13/6.

The Argus, 6 Aug 1934

Notice is hereby given that a First and Final DIVIDEND is intended to be Paid in the matter of ELSIE ROSE BEATRICE BOLAM of 36 Domain St, South Yarra (formerly of Narbethong thence) guesthouse proprietress who executed a deed of arrangement of the eighteenth day of July 1934 which was registered on the twenty fifth day of July 1934. Creditors who have not

proved their debt by the twenty first day of August, 1934 will be excluded from the dividend.

Dated the 3 day of August 1934
M R M SMITH, Trustee
108 Queens St, Melbourne.

The Marysville Tourist and Progress Association would not let her retire and she would continue to be involved there for many more decades.

Alexandra & Yea Standard, 8 Jan 1937
also Kilmore Free Press, 28 Jan 1937

Marysville has appointed a salaried tourist officer in Melbourne to put its attractions before the public. Miss Elsie Bolam, who lived in the district for 20 years, will take up the work. She will keep in touch with hotels, accommodation houses, booking offices, banks, and shipping offices and furnish them with tourist literature pointing out the charms of Marysville.

Healesville & Yarra Glen Guardian, 16 Jan 1937

The progressive district of Marysville has taken an enterprising step in appointing Miss E. Bolam, late of Narbethong, as a personal publicity officer in Melbourne. The appointment is permanent, and Miss Bolam is allowed free scope in inducing tourists and holiday makers to visit the beautiful region beyond the Blacks' Spur. Miss Bolam is keeping in close contact with the Government Tourist Bureau, the Australian National Travel Association and other departments and officials interested in promoting tourist traffic. Evidently she is proving an able ambassadress for Marysville, which should now be booming more than ever.

In January 1942 Marysville Tourist Bureau was at the Empire Arcade, 268 Flinders Street (opposite the station) Phone Central 222 0857.

In the middle of 1942 Elsie and Lesley were back living in Marysville in 'Little Kerami', a cottage Elsie built in Kerami Crescent across the road from the Marysville Chalet. This cottage was there until the 2009 Fires. The surgery rooms by the Crossways were being manned by Elsie again.

In 1942 she was elected President of the local Red Cross¹⁵ and back as secretary at the Marysville Tourist & Progress Association.

Alexandra & Yea Standard, 24 Mar 1950

Wanted---Working Bailiff. Permanent position if suitable Wages £8 per week. Particulars E. Bolam, Secretary, Marysville Tourist Association. Phone Marysville 28.

Alexandra & Yea Standard 12 Oct 1951

Wanted By Marysville Progress Association: Working. Bailiff, Wages £15, 40 hour week. For particulars apply E. R. Bolam, Hon. Sec.

The Argus, 26 Feb 1951

Bus terminus MEMBERS of Marysville and District Tourist and Progress Association protest against the State Government's refusal to let the Road Passenger Service Operators' Association set up a committee to investigate sites for a central bus terminus in Melbourne.

My association strongly believes that the Government has been very misleading in its attitude to the proposals that have been placed before it. We have examined those

proposals in detail and find that they do not call on the Government for funds, but merely ask for co-operation in helping to find the most suitable site. Establishment of a bus terminus is essential for country people. They are entitled to it, and to expect the

Government to co-operate with private enterprise in selecting the best site. ELSIE R. B. BOLAM (hon. sec. Marysville Tourist and Progress Association).

The Weekly Times feature on Marysville, 27 May 1953 included a number of community groups



Tourist Association and Gallipoli Park Committee. Back row: Mr H. McNamara, Cr. F. J. Barton (pres.), Messrs R. Vautier and B. Simmons. Front row: Mr F. G. Cobb, Misses L, McGowan and E. Bolam (sec.), Messrs B. J. Higgs and J. Carmody [Darmody].

Elsie and Lesley were Royalists so a visit to the Marysville Picture Theatre involved dressing formally and standing straight when "God Save the Queen" was played at the beginning of proceedings.

Healesville Guardian, 9 Apr 1954

Marysville branch of the Liberal and Country Party held their annual meeting on Thursday; April 1, at the Chalet Hotel. There was a good attendance and office-bearers were elected to fill all positions. Councillor F. J. Barton continued in the chair, and Miss E. Bolam is

the new secretary. Mr. R. Fulton gave an address and spoke on the effect that Socialism could have on local affairs. Refreshments were taken and an enjoyable and instructive evening ended.

Came for year - is still there

SHE sat in a quiet room in a quiet house near Marysville's Crossroads - a small, vivid, laughing woman who, for many years, has been Marysville's Florence Nightingale. On Friday the people of Marysville and its area will honour her when she, with Cr. Fred Barton will share the honour of bringing electricity to Marysville.

Sister Elsie Bolam is a legend. A trained nursing sister, she has for 35 years (with a break during the war when she was co-opted to work in the city's emergency services) been Marysville's "honorary doctor". Marysville has not had a resident doctor.

Always ready

"BUT in the tourist season, the population swells to 2,000, the many sawmills provide inevitable mishaps and then Sister Bolam, with her lifelong friend, Sister Lesley McGowan, are ready with advanced skill, advice, and round-the-clock availability.

They work closely with the doctors in the district. From their little surgery at the Crossroads, in their visits to homes, in their goings and their comings, they have won for themselves a place of honour in the life of the township.

"Now we have electricity," Sister Bolam says, "we may get a small hospital and perhaps a resident doctor, maybe one who has retired from the strain and the hurly-burly of city practice". Until then, Sister Bolam and her co-worker will be the guardians of and the ministers to the health and well-being of the people.

Sister Bolam was one of the first presidents of Marysville's vigorous Tourist and Progress Association; she was its secretary for many years.

"We," she says, nodding at her smiling friend, Sister McGowan, "have never had a chance to retire". Sister Bolam trained at Beechworth and Melbourne; held important administrative posts in major hospitals; came to Marysville to "stand in" for 12 months in the conduct of Kerami guest house.

"I am Marysville's best advertisement," she says. "I came for a year and stayed for a generation." So great is her vitality, and vivacity, that she (and Sister McGowan) look safe for another generation. At least, Marysville hopes so.



Elsie Bolam cutting the ribbon while Cr Fred Barton pressed the switch to turn on electricity from the Victorian grid in 1955.

Healesville Guardian, 2 Dec 1955 Extract

". . . Sister Bolam has been a tireless worker for Marysville, and has striven for many years to have S.E.C. power connected. She has held almost every executive position of the Marysville Tourist and Progress Association, and as far back as 1929, she presented the scissors to Lord Somers when he opened the Acheron Way.

She has also been Marysville's "medical officer", as with no residential doctor, she has ministered to the needs of the community at all times, and under all conditions. . . .

A year after Sister Elsie Bolam had been part of the turning on of SEC electricity to the town of Marysville a request was lodged with the Shire Council for a light outside her house in Kerami Crescent.

Healesville Guardian, 2 Mar 1956, report from the February Shire Council Meeting

Twenty Marysville ratepayers, for improvement to Cumberland rd.; a light required out side Sister Bolam's home; asking council to take over Kerami crescent; dust nuisance (road sealing advocated).

C.R.B. to be asked to seal road to "Kerami", and shire will probably take over road, as advocated by Crs. Barton and Richards; light to be inspected by Cr. Barton and engineer.

The Marysville community organised for Elsie Bolam to be honoured in the 1960 New Year's honours with the British Empire Medal (MBE) for Meritorious Civil Service.

"For over forty years Elsie had been involved in the promotion of Marysville, the push to have access and maintain the bush tourist attractions, she had given unstintingly of her time to assist the sick and injured and belonged to many local groups."

The Medal was displayed at the Marysville Primary School after Elsie's death and in 2007 the medal was donated to the Marysville & District Historical Society where it was on display until the 2009 Black Saturday Fires. It was found in the ashes burnt and damaged and was restored by Mr Bradley Finn, Jeweller and David Presgrave, Medal Historian free of charge in 2009. It is now in the custody of the Marysville & District Historical Society.



That evening, 300 local people gathered outside, Little Kerami, the cottage where she lived to congratulate her and a public subscription was gathered to purchase a television set for both Elsie and Lesley to enjoy.



Elsie Bolam died from heart failure on 4 September 1965 and was buried in Marysville Cemetery. At the time of Elsie's death her life-long companion Lesley MacGowan was suffering from colon cancer and died on 18 June 1966. She was cremated and the whereabouts of her ashes is not known. It is hoped they are in Elsie Bolam's grave.

END NOTES

¹ The Argus, 6 Dec 1955.

² Lesley's family name is MacGowan, although often spelt McGowan. Lesley used MacGowan when registering on electoral rolls and it is MacGowan on her death certificate.

³ Vic BMD Reg No 20316 registered Jan 1880, but born Oct 1879. Registration page in hand.

⁴ Camperdown Chronicle, 5 Mar 1884 & Kerang Times 26 Feb 1884.

⁵ Australian Electoral Rolls start with 1903.

⁶ Vic Government Gazettes.

⁷ Death Reg No 6466.

⁸ Rev Allan Scott was the Anglican minister in Alexandra.

⁹ Lesley McGowan was to become a lifelong companion to Elsie. See Lesley Elinor Archibald McGowan document.

¹⁰ This statement could date the previous photos as after 1921.

¹¹ 1931 Electoral Roll Ernest Nathaniel Robarts, 'Kerami', Marysville, boarding house . In the years prior to this (1925 & 1928) Ernest Nathaniel Robarts, Healesville, coach proprietor.

¹² Argus, 12 Dec, 1936.

¹³ Advertisement for the New Blacks' Spur Hotel in the Herald, 15 May 1933 in Misses Bolam and MacGowan's name.

¹⁴ "Nar-be-thong Historical notes with local recollections", John Mole, 2013, page 60.

¹⁵ Alexandra & Yea Standard, 21 Aug 1942.