

P.O.Box 137, ELTHAM 3095

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NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER, 1978

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Details of the next meeting of the society are as follows:-

When 8p.m. Wednesday 13th September

Where War Memorial Hall  
905 Main Road, Eltham.

Guest Speaker Mr. L. A. Schumer O.B.E.

Mr. Schumer will speak on Henry Dendy, founder of Brighton and prominent early resident of Eltham. He is author of the book "Henry Dendy and His Emigrants" and recently has been in England delving further into Dendy's background. Mr. Schumer's talk will be illustrated with slides. New Members and visitors are welcome at all society meetings.

SOCIETY EXCURSION - FOLK AND OLD TRADES MUSEUM

Arrangements have been made for the society to visit the private museum of Mr. Dolf Slykhuis at 8 Alfred Street, Blackburn between 2 and 4p.m. on Saturday 28th October. The museum contains a wide range of tools with some working machinery and vehicles. There is a donation of 80cents each for adults, children are half price. Transport will be by private car but as there is a limit on the number attending please advise the secretary not later than 14th October if you wish to come along.

RECENT ACTIVITIES

July Meeting. Local bottle collector Ron Stoneman showed members at this meeting an extensive range of bottles and other items from his collection. Ron is a real enthusiast who would much rather search for old bottles than purchase them. He discussed the bottles on display and the "wheres" and "hows" of their collection.

Eltham Community Festival.

This year's Eltham Community Festival was held from August 4th to 13th. The society was involved with the Warrandyte Historical Society in arranging an exhibition at the Community Centre and also provided notes and a map for a self guided walking tour of historic buildings and locations around Eltham. Copies of notes will continue to be available from the Eltham Shire Offices and the tour may be undertaken at any time.

The exhibition was divided into two sections. The Eltham Society displayed early photographs associated with the walking tour, whilst the Warrandyte Society showed their photographs and artefacts of the Warrandyte gold era. An outstanding feature was the large "blow-up" photos of early Warrandyte.

LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

It is pleasing to note the number of articles on local history or with an historical slant which have appeared recently in both of our local newspapers. In the case of the series of articles on local communities in the Diamond Valley News the writers have uncovered many interesting anecdotes from the long time residents of each district. The society's archives have gained some previously unrecorded information from this series.

More recent history has been recorded in the regular articles in the Valley Voice by Alistair Knox. This series provides a detailed social history of an important group of Eltham residents and the associated history of the environmental building movement in Eltham.

Both papers are to be congratulated for their continuing involvement in this field and should be given every encouragement to carry on the promotion of the many aspects of local history.

SOME VERY LOCAL HISTORY

Commencing in this newsletter is (hopefully) a series of articles which will examine the history of small areas of the Shire of Eltham. They may or may not follow some logical sequence (depending on availability of material and the whims of potential writers). There is however some logic in the area chosen as a starting point. The Bonds Road area, as well as being the "bottom corner" of the Shire is also the area of the first white occupation and the first land purchase. It is therefore a suitable area to commence with in both geographical and chronological terms.

HISTORY OF MONTMORENCY

An enquiry made to the society indicates that there is a strong interest in compiling a history of the Montmorency area with a view to publishing a booklet on this subject. This interest should be encouraged by assistance from the society. Any member (or anyone else interested) who could help with the research or interviews for this project is asked to contact the Secretary.

NEW MEMBERS

The society always welcomes new members. At present we have a number of potential projects which are not proceeding because a lack of active members. In particular we seek members with special skills which may be of assistance to the society. For example the society does not have available a great deal of photographic expertise.

It is not, however, a pre requisite for membership that you do have any special skill. The only qualification for membership is an interest in local history. The membership subscription is intended only to cover the society's operating costs and is a nominal \$3.00 per annum. Students subscription is \$1.00 whilst a family may join for \$5.00. We would also be interested in recording details of local people interested in the history of the area but who are unable to join the society because of

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BONDS ROAD AREA, LOWER PLENTY.

It is often difficult to establish firm boundaries for the area of an historical study. In this case we have the natural boundaries of the Yarra and Plenty Rivers together with the cadastral boundary of Rosehill Road in the north. The rivers bound a peninsular of land which is the south western corner of the Shire of Eltham and a self contained geographical unit. Together with the area extending easterly between Rosehill Road and the Yarra River it also forms a fairly well contained historical unit. The history of any area is the story of the land, its resources, its people and its development. Because it came first we should commence the story with the land. For the geologically minded the area comprises silt stone and sandstone deposits of Silurian age on the higher levels, whilst the river flats are geologically recent alluvial deposits.

The terrain varies from extensive river flats along the western and southern sides of the peninsular to higher land sloping steeply down to the river in the east and in the Rosehill Road area. The hilltops command extensive views along the Yarra Valley. Except for the immediate river environs the land has been cleared. The only evidence of the former vegetation which remains is the old River Red Gums which are scattered throughout the area. These trees are of the spreading woodland form of this species indicating that they must have been originally growing in a reasonably open setting.

Along the river some uncleared land remains providing important fauna habitats. Remnants of this riparian vegetation system occur on the slopes below Rosehill Road and at "The Island". This latter feature is a bend in the Yarra believed to have been cut off by a new channel formed by a flood in the 1890's. This channel now forming the main course of the river certainly did not appear on Surveyor William Wedge Darke's original plan of the river produced in 1837.

Prior to white settlement the Yarra valley was the territory of the Wawurong or Yarra tribe of aborigines. Very little has been recorded of their activities and one of the few remnants of their occupation of the area is a "canoe tree" near the junction of the Yarra and Plenty Rivers.

The earliest recorded settler in the area was Edward Willis who had a pastoral run at the junction of the Plenty and Yarra Rivers prior to 1837. As was the case with many of the lands occupied by squatters of this period the boundaries are unrecorded. A visitor to the area in 1837 recorded that Willis was living in a tent but he later built a house some distance to the north near the present Main Road bridge over the Plenty.

Willis's occupation of at least part of his run was short lived. The first land sales in the Parish of Keelbundora were held on 12th September 1838. The land sold comprised the present Heidelberg and extended across the Plenty River to what is now the line of Bonds Road. Portion 7 was the land which straddled the Plenty and this was bought by George Porter. It totalled 780 acres of which about 480 acres were in the present Shire of Eltham. This was the first land purchased within the Shire.

George Porter (1800-1848) came to Sydney in 1835, having some years earlier left his native Yorkshire to live in Malaya. He brought with him a wife, six children and a large quantity of goods with which to establish himself as a merchant. By 1839 Porter had moved to the Port Phillip District and had established two addresses, one being his house in Melbourne and the other one on his Lower Plenty property. Both were named "Cleveland" after his former home in the Cleveland Hills, Yorkshire. Following Porter's death the property appears to have been handled by two of his sons, John and George Junior.

The Lower Plenty "Cleveland" was apparently occupied only spasmodically by the Porter family and the property was split up into 3 or 4 farms occupied by tenant farmers. In 1863 the tenant of the land on the Eltham side of the Plenty was Thomas Mundy who had won many prizes for ploughing and was considered the best ploughman in Victoria. A tenant on the Heidelberg side was Joseph Bond whose family later figured prominently in the history of the Lower Plenty area.

The land to the east of Porter's purchase was not sold by the government until 1855. In that year the land between Bonds and Rosehill Roads and the Yarra River was sold in 5 allotments ranging from 44 to 109 acres, and comprising Section 1A of the Parish of Nillumbik. Purchasers were S. Wekey, Henry Stooke, R. Moody and J. Foxton who bought two allotments. Wekey's land adjoined Bolton Street which was the western boundary of the Eltham Village Reserve. Few details are known of any of these purchasers excepting Henry Stooke who bought Allotment 2 of some 80 acres. He had previously purchased land at Eltham and went on to serve for many years as Chairman of the Eltham District Road Board. In about 1858 he built the house "Rosehill" on his Lower Plenty land. This house remains substantially unaltered and has been classified by the National Trust.

By 1863 the peninsular we are considering had become a well established farming area with a bridge across the Yarra at the end of Bonds Road connecting it with Templestowe. In December of that year there occurred the worst floods recorded on the Yarra and it is said that the river rose 50 feet above its normal level. The bridge was washed away and the farmers of the area faced huge losses. Thomas Munday lost \$14,000, his crop of 70 acres of potatoes being destroyed. The Porter family repossessed some of the farms of their tenants although apparently in Munday's case they agreed to forgo the rent and to supply seed for the next season.

The bridge was not replaced and the area remained isolated from through traffic and relatively unchanged for many years. Early this century the Bond family purchased "Rosehill" from Henry Stooke's descendants. The Bonds also bought other land in the area between Rosehill Road and the river. The family owned the "Rosehill" property until 1958.

In 1924 the Cleveland Estate was subdivided into 71 lots by the Porter family. The lots ranged in size from 5 to 76 acres and included land on both the Eltham and Heidelberg sides of the Plenty. The subdivision created the present roads, Cleveland Avenue, Stawell Road and Henty Road. The bridge over the Plenty in Henty Road was apparently built about this time although obviously the Porters had some crossing prior to this. The plan produced for the 1924 land sale shows the "original homestead" on a site in Cleveland Ave. This house is now demolished and it is not known whether it was the house built by George Porter in the 1830's.

The character of the area is now one of small rural residential holdings although there is a significant proportion of non residential use and to the east of Bonds Road, much of the land has been subdivided into lots of 0.4 ha. (1 acre) for residential purposes.

This subdivision includes the former Stooke property which in the late 1960's was subdivided into residential lots based on Montpelier Drive.

To the north and south of Stooke's land are properties owned by branches of the Catholic Church. To the north a former private house (on a rather grand scale) is now used as the Christian Brothers' Novitiate. To the south the Seminary of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers dominates the river flats. This building was constructed in three stages during the 1950's. A suspension footbridge was constructed across the Yarra to allow priests easier access to Melbourne and to allow residents of Templestowe to attend services at the Seminary. The construction of the bridge was commenced during a flood and a small dog was sent across with a string which was used to start a succession of larger ropes across the river. The Seminary has been virtually unused for some time now and its future is uncertain.

In recent years parts of the Cleveland Estate have been developed for a variety of purposes. To the north of Cleveland Avenue is the M.M.B.W. Lower Plenty Purification Plant which deals with the sewerage system for the Plenty valley. Associated with it is a division of the C.S.I.R.O. carrying out research into various aspects of waste water. At the junction of the Plenty and Yarra Rivers is the Rosanna Golf Club which extends across the Plenty into the City of Heidelberg.

Another type of use for which this area is apparently ideal is radio transmission. Several major radio stations have established tall aerial masts on the higher land near Stawell Road. These red and white masts form a major feature of the landscape of the area.

In the future the character of a large part of the area examined is unlikely to change to a significant extent. Most of the large area of river flats in the Cleveland Estate and the narrower flood plain extending upstream are to be purchased for inclusion in the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park. The rest of the Cleveland Estate is subject to a zoning which will not permit further subdivision. South of Rosehill Road there exist relatively large properties which may be subdivided, but only into low density residential lots.

The area which we have studied is one which is rich in detailed local history. The proposals for the future of the area are such that the remaining visible components of this history, including the landscape of the river valleys are likely to be retained in a recognizable form and not be submerged in the tide of suburbia. It is considered that from an historical viewpoint these proposals are quite appropriate.

#### References

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Russell Yeoman  
Secretary  
439 9717

Peter Bassett-Smith  
President  
712 0260

