

# shire of eltham historical society

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## newsletter no.16 january 1981

### Next Meeting

The February meeting will be held at 8 pm on Wednesday 11th February, 1981 in the War Memorial Hall 905 Main Road, Eltham.

The format of the meeting will be a discussion evening with members raising the items for discussion. The intention is that each member introduces an item in which he/she is particularly interested. You should therefore come prepared with information to speak for, say, 5 minutes on your favorite topic with a view to encouraging discussion to draw out information or opinions which other members may have on the subject. Topics may be general interest or specific items of local history. For instance, we know of one member with a marvellous collection of old books that we know very little about, another is a rather modest expert on antiques and yet another has a wealth of knowledge on all types of old mechanical equipment.

On a more specific subject, the writer is interested in the history of the Maroondah Aqueduct and its preservation following replacement of much of the old channel by an underground water main and intends to raise this matter for discussion. This type of discussion on an informal basis has resulted in many interesting interludes at society committee meetings. In this widened form the meeting may provide a stimulus for action by the society on some particular subject or a more detailed agenda item for a future meeting.

As usual at society meetings, new members and visitors are welcome. Please bring any friends who may be interested in the historical pot-pourri which we will present.

### Annual General Meeting

The 1981 Annual General Meeting including election of office bearers will be held on Wednesday 11th March. The next newsletter will contain further details.

### To Name a Park.

The Society has been asked by the Victorian Place Names Committee to comment on a proposal by the Shire of Eltham to assign names to parklands in Eltham as follows:-

"Eltham Common" - the area between the municipal offices, Main Road, the Eltham railway -line, and Panther Place and containing Shillinglaw Cottage. The Shire has advised that this name has been used locally for the site since about 1975.

"Alistair Knox Park" - the area bounded by the Eltham railway -line, Panther Place, Main Road, Bridge Street, and Susan Street, and through which flows the Diamond Creek. The area has been known locally as "Eltham Town Park".

The proposed name "Alistair Knox Park" has created some local controversy with a number of reversals of the Council's decision and letters to the local paper both for and against the proposal. The society is reluctant to be drawn into this controversy particularly as there are known to be members with strong views both for and against the proposed name. However the society's committee has considered the matter and has resolved that the society appreciates the work done by Alistair Knox both in the formulation of the park concept and in its development but because of the controversy generated by the proposed naming and also because of the wide general use of the park by the public, the name Eltham Town Park is more appropriate. The society has noted that it knows of no outstanding historical associations with the land comprising the park which would warrant naming the park after any particular person, place or event. No objection is raised to the Eltham Common proposal as set-out above.

The decision was made in the knowledge that Alistair Knox has been associated with the society over many years and is a prominent figure in the recent history of Eltham. He is regarded as a key figure in the environmental building movement and in particular is renowned for his use of mud bricks as a building material. He served as a councillor of the Shire of Eltham from 1971-1975, his final year as Shire President. It was during these years that the proposals to create the park in its present form were shaped and Alistair played a leading part in the decision to make it a landscaped passive recreational park rather than a sporting area.

It is appropriate at this time to mention a little of the history of the land which comprises a section of the Diamond Creek valley. The creek itself flows through the centre of the area which is overlooked by steep hills on each side. The parks form part of the land purchased from the Crown in 1851 by J.M. Holloway and then subdivided into allotments and called "Little Eltham". While most of the area was subdivided into residential lots the creek valley was subdivided into lots suitable for small farms. Some further subdivision took place over the years and the whole of the parks now comprises eight separate titles. A list of some of the former owners has been compiled but exhaustive research on all owners has not been carried out. The ownership of one parcel has been traced back to when it was purchased from Holloway by John Hicks Petty in 1874, long after it was subdivided. Other families owning land within the area over the years included Lyon, Rees, Clark, Waterfall, Carrucan, Graham, Hill and Morant.

The character of the valley area has remained rural while development occurred on each side. Early photos show the area as orchard and grazing land. In 1901 the railway was constructed through the area resulting in the timber trestle bridge across the Diamond Creek, which is an important feature of the park landscape. A memorial to the Eltham servicemen killed in World War 1 was erected at the south eastern corner of the park. The site is now within the intersection of Main Road and Bridge Street and the memorial has been shifted to the Eltham R.S.L. clubrooms.

During the early 1960's the Council started purchasing the land which now comprises the parks. In the late 1960's the area to the east of the Diamond creek was used as a garbage tip and filled above the flood plain of the creek. When this area was filled the tip was transferred to the west side of the creek.

From the early 1970's the area has been progressively developed as a park for passive recreation with ornamental lakes, extensive tree planting and landscaping. The character of the valley before the days of the tip has been recreated and this has earned a Landscape classification from the National Trust, an unusual honour for a man-made landscape.

The parks are not only attractive in appearance. The large number of people using them, particularly at weekends and holidays is evidence of their popularity and the foresight and careful planning of local residents, Councillors and Council Staff.

#### The Shire of Eltham Brass Band

Mr. Ted Barnes of Eltham has presented the society with a history of the Shire of Eltham Brass Band and L.P. record entitled "Year One" made at the band's first anniversary concert. The history is called "Poco a Poco" a musical term meaning "little by little". It sets out in some detail the story of the band for its first ten years after its formation in 1955.

The society is grateful to Mr. Barnes for this contribution. Whilst we do have records from other local organisations few are as detailed as his carefully researched document.

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