

shire of eltham historical society

p.o. box 137, eltham, victoria, 3095.

newsletter no.23

march 1982

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8.00 PM, WEDNESDAY, 10TH MARCH, 1982

ELTHAM SHIRE OFFICES

895 MAIN ROAD, ELTHAM

PANEL DISCUSSION: "THE ELTHAM LANDSCAPE"

VISITORS AND NEW MEMBERS WELCOME

WILLIAMSTOWN BUS TRIP

SUNDAY 21ST MARCH, 1982

LEAVING ELTHAM SHIRE OFFICES 11.00 AM.

COST: ADULTS \$3.00 CHILDREN \$1.50

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 1981 Annual General Meeting
3. Annual Reports
 - (a) President's Report
 - (b) Secretary's Report
 - (c) Treasurer's Report
 - (d) Other Reports
4. Election of Office Bearers 1982
All office bearers retire and are eligible for re-election. Nominations for all positions may be submitted in writing to the secretary prior to the meeting or will be accepted at the meeting. Office bearers required are:-
 - President
 - Vice President (2)
 - Secretary
 - Assistant Secretary
 - Treasurer
 - Committee Members (4)
5. Fixing of Annual Subscriptions
6. Any other business which may be considered by the Annual General Meeting (Details of such business should be supplied in writing to the secretary prior to the meeting):

THE ELTHAM LANDSCAPE

Eltham and its shire are widely known as an area of high quality landscape. This is a matter largely taken for granted by many local residents even though it may form a substantial reason for their living here. Many aspects of the landscape have changed during the recorded history of the area and the landscape itself has influenced the history. In particular it has attracted many artists and lovers of the Australian bushland to make their homes here, a factor which has certainly contributed to the character of Eltham.

Following the formal business of the Annual General Meeting it is proposed that a panel of speakers will discuss the subject from a wide diversity of viewpoints. It is intended that each panel member speak briefly on the particular aspect of the landscape which he or she considers to be of most interest. It may be this will turn out to be a list of local areas of particular beauty or a philosophical discussion on the quality of the landscape. It is intended that these initial short talks generate discussion between the panel members and generally amongst the members present.

The subject is intended to cover the landscape of the Shire of Eltham and even other nearby areas rather than just that of Eltham itself. The members of the panel are all residents of Eltham or nearby areas each with a knowledge of some aspect of the local landscape. Some members could be described as experts in their field whilst others will present more a lay-person's point of view.

The panel members are :-

Michael Burston - Resident of Eltham and a member of the Landscape Committee of the National Trust. Michael's formal training is in the field of horticulture.

Peter Bassett-Smith - Former President of the Society and a farmer at Kangaroo Ground.

Bill Caldwell - A well known local artist of many years standing.

Jan Moad - Landscape architect with extensive experience throughout Australia in parkland projects, coastal and waterways studies etc.. Jan played a major role in the report for the proposed development of the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park by Scott and Furphy Engineers Pty.Ltd..

Lorna Shilton - Leader of a local bushwalking group for the past 6 years. Lorna has extensive walking experience throughout Australia and overseas and has been involved in teaching bushwalking.

Russell Yeoman - Society Secretary with no particular expertise in the field of landscape, except some knowledge of the history of its development.

WILLIAMSTOWN TRIP.

As previously advised the Society will visit Williamstown on Sunday 21st March. Travel will be by bus which will depart from the Eltham Shire Offices at 11a.m. sharp. Please be present by 10.45 a.m.

Bruce Ness has kindly donated his services as driver and as a result we have been able to keep the cost at \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for children. To book your seat please complete the attached form and hand to the Secretary at the A.S.M. or return to the Society's P.O. Box by not later than the 12th March together with your payment. (Please note that previous lists have been taken as indication of interest only. No booking is complete until the form and payment are returned). Friends of members are welcome and the bookings will be confirmed in order of receipt whether members of the Society or not.

Bring your own picnic lunch. We will be having lunch on arrival at Williamstown and proceeding on a tour of the area at about 1.30p.m. under the guidance of members of the Williamstown Historical Society. Guide facilities may be available for anyone preferring to travel by private car. Contact the Secretary for details.

SHILLINGLAW COTTAGE -- AN INTERIM REPORT --

Shillinglaw Cottage is an established landmark in Eltham and its connections with the area are recognized by many people from other suburbs; particularly those who frequently take a weekend drive through Eltham. Most of us know that the cottage is reputed to have been built in 1859 by George Stebbing and that it later became the home of the Shillinglaw family for more than 80 years. We also know the story of how a group of local people arranged and financed the re-location of the cottage when its site was required for the new shire offices in 1963. A number of our Society members were involved in the committee which organized the preservation of this building. Shillinglaw Cottage is classified by the National Trust and included in the Register of the National Estate.

Despite the fact that the building is so well known little of its history seems to have been recorded. Perhaps some research work was carried out at the time of its re-location but, if so, little seems to be now available. The building itself was very accurately surveyed and this enabled the high standard of reconstruction which has been achieved.

Shillinglaw Cottage has been witness to many changes in its surroundings and among the more recent of these was the re-location and re-building of the cottage itself. It originally stood on the site of the present Eltham Shire Offices a little to the north of its present location. In 1963, when it became apparent that the cottage would be demolished, a group of interested local people was formed initially to retain the cottage and subsequently to preserve it by re-location to its present site. Former Society President and Councillor Charis Belling has been Chairperson of the Shillinglaw Cottage Preservation Committee since its inception. Many prominent and not so well known local residents have served on the committee. It is not possible to list all of the members of the committee and others who assisted. Whilst not detracting from the efforts of others whose efforts may have been just as significant it is worth recording that the survey of the building carried out by Alistair Knox and Peter Glass identified the location of individual bricks for re-location in their correct position on the new site.

The original intention to establish some form of local museum in the cottage has not been forgotten but has proved to be impracticable to date. The tenants, Eltham Fleececrafts have provided some income to repay commitments of the Committee and have provided a use in keeping with the commonly accepted concept of the Eltham lifestyle.

The purpose of this article is to air some aspects of the history of the building which have been the subject of recent research in connection with a proposed article in the Diamond Valley News in the "link with our past" series. The research is by no means exhaustive and may duplicate and in some cases contradict other published or privately held information.

In 1951 J.M. Holloway commenced the subdivision of his square mile of land north of the government reserve which had been set aside to become the township of Eltham. Holloway called his subdivision "Little Eltham". The majority of the 800 odd lots were about 0.2 ha (1/2 acre) in size. Along the valley of the Diamond Creek which flowed through the centre of the subdivision were a number of larger lots intended as small farms. The largest of these was lot 90 of some 12 ha (30 acres) and extending along the creek from Henry Street to Buck Street, (both being streets of Holloway's subdivision). Lot 90 was later to become the site of Shillinglaw Cottage.

Before the cottage was built the land was subjected to a change of boundaries. Not long after Holloway's subdivision a plan was prepared by government surveyors entitled "Diagram of the Road from the Plenty River to the Kangaroo Ground". It showed the previously adopted road alignment west of the township reserve and formally fixed a new road alignment through the reserve, Holloway's land, and generally along the line of the present Main Road to the fringe of the already settled area of Kangaroo Ground. The plan showed several "old" road alignments traversing the creek flats through lot 90. It also indicated that lot 90 was cultivated land, the only such improvement within Holloway's subdivision. Whether the cultivation is due to the original purchaser of lot 90 or to Bell and Armstrongs the earlier holders of the pastoral run covering the area, is a matter of speculation.

The new road would have resulted in the first of many reductions in the area of Lot 90.

The next phase of the history is the building of the first stage of the cottage. Surveys of the building on its original site indicate that it was built in at least three (possibly four) stages. Not all of the building has been preserved but two 1963 reports differ as to whether the re-located section contains the original part of the cottage.

Accounts of the history of the cottage which have been written within the past 20 years categorically state that the cottage was built in 1859. Research of rate records provides no confirmation of this date. These records make no mention of George Stebbing, who built at least part of the cottage, until 1861. In 1859/60, a Joseph or Josiah Stebbings is recorded as being the person rated in respect of a hut owned by G. Atkinson. National Trust files indicate that the original cottage was built by a person called Cochrane but this aspect has not been pursued.

In 1861, George Stebbing was rated as the owner and occupier of a house in Eltham. Whilst this house could have been Shillinglaw Cottage it could also (as far as the rate records are concerned) have been the house still existing at 86 Pitt Street, also built by Stebbing and reputed to have been his home for some years. Titles searches may assist in establishing ownership of the relevant parcels of land in these early years, although any researcher who has examined the land titles of this era will understand that these may provide room for interpretation or even speculation as to the actual circumstances of the ownership.

What we can establish from the rate records of the Roads Board and later the Council, is that during the period 1861 to 1887 Shillinglaw Cottage was one of a number of houses and other properties owned by George Stebbing. In the earlier years of the period he is described as a bricklayer but in the later years his occupation is generally listed as a farmer. In the 1870's he is recorded as the owner of up to five houses. The various tenants are recorded as the ratepayers. Various notes in the rate-books assist in their interpretation but cross-checking of these notes with other information is necessary to confirm many of assumptions made. In one case Stebbing is recorded as being the owner of the "late parsonage". It is unlikely but a possibility that the building was Shillinglaw Cottage.

The rate-book shows that in 1881 Phillip Shillinglaw, Carrier, became the ratepayer for the cottage but Stebbing was still the owner. The tenant immediately prior to Shillinglaw was one James Rossiter, Journalist, who is also recorded as the ratepayer in respect of a printing office at Kangaroo Ground - the office of the Evelyn Observer.

Stebbing's name appears as owner in the rate-book until 1887 and from then until the land was purchased by the Council in 1963, it was owned by the Shillinglaw family. Two Misses Shillinglaw still lived in the cottage when it was purchased by the Council.

The period of the Shillinglaw ownership would have seen many changes to the boundaries of the land. The major change occurred at the turn of the century when land for the railway and Eltham station was acquired from the land. This acquisition split the land into two parts. The larger area between the creek and the railway was later acquired by the Council and became Eltham Central Park and Andrew Park. The cottage remained on the smaller area between the railway and Main Road.

Following the opening of the railway the northern part of the land was the site of some of the first commercial developments in what was to become the Eltham shopping centre. A number of lots of varying size were subdivided from the land between the present fire station and the railway station entrance. These lots contained shops and other business premises which are now all demolished and replaced by the second and even third generation of commercial development. Later still the land immediately north of the cottage was purchased by the Eltham War Memorial Trust and became the site of the present War Memorial group of buildings and the fire station. The Trust's land eventually passed to the Council.

The remaining area containing the house was only 0.2 ha (2 acres) and the purchase by the Council as the site for the new shire offices terminated the Shillinglaw family's ownership of any of lot 90. It is interesting to note that the whole of lot 90, with the exception of the commercial development between the fire station and the post office and possibly some land on the eastern side of Main Road, has now come into the ownership of the Council or government instrumentalities.

All avenues for tracing the history of the cottage have not been exhausted. In particular title searches and the tracing of personal records of owners and occupiers would be likely to provide useful information. It would be a worthwhile exercise to follow up these leads to provide as complete a picture of the cottage as possible.

Kath Stephenson,
President.
439 9588

Russell Yeoman
Secretary.
439 9717