

# ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

## NEWSLETTER

NO. 143 MARCH 2002

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> MARCH

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE  
903 MAIN ROAD ELTHAM  
(ENTER FROM OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)

"WHAT AN ACT"  
THE STORY OF THE ELTHAM LITTLE THEATRE  
GEORGE AND ESME BARKER

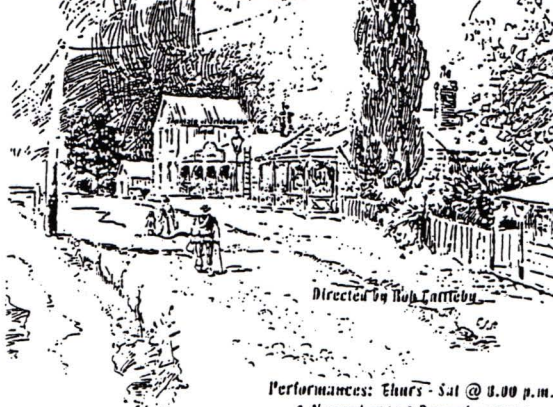


proudly presents

*Music Hall & Melodrama*

*"Power's Persuasion"*

by Cheryl Ballantine & Leo Regan



Directed by Rob Lattedy

Performances: Thurs - Sat @ 8.00 p.m.  
2 November to 2 December 2000

Eltham Little Theatre programme  
featuring the Fountain Hotel,  
Maria Street, Eltham.

**BJO: Food, Drink, Glasses, Plates, Cutlery**

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

The March meeting is the Annual General Meeting and the first part of the evening will be devoted to the formal procedures set out in the agenda published in the January Newsletter. This includes the annual reports reviewing the activities of the past year and election of the 2002 Committee to take us through the year ahead. A copy of the President's Annual Report is attached to this Newsletter.

Members who feel that they have something to contribute are urged to nominate for a position on the Committee. New ideas and enthusiasm are always welcome and are necessary for the on-going vitality of the Society.

As always, we have included a most interesting agenda item to encourage members to attend the AGM. But attendance should not rely on the guest speakers. We hope that people will come along also because of their interest in the Society itself and will work to ensure that it remains an important and relevant organization within the Eltham scene.

## **GEORGE AND ESME BARKER**

Eltham Little Theatre has its origins in a play reading group meeting in private houses in 1958. One section of this group soon began play performances, at first utilizing the Shire Hall at the corner of Arthur Street and Main Road. George remembers that performances were held on Thursday and Friday evenings and the sets had to be removed for the Saturday movies. Sets were stored in Lyons garage across the road.

In 1965 the group moved to Research Hall and later the purpose built Eltham Performing Arts Centre on the same site.

Esme was a founding member of the Little Theatre and George joined it soon after. Their combined knowledge of the history of the group could not be equalled. Their involvement with the theatre as actors places them in an excellent position to provide an entertaining and humorous talk.

## **"ESCAPING THE BIG SMOKE"**

In association with the Victorian Heritage Festival the Committee of Eastern Historical Societies is producing a booklet with the above title designed to reflect the National Trust's theme for the Festival. The booklet will be available for the Festival which commences at the end of March.

It will contain articles contributed by member societies and we have provided two.

Appropriately in the year of the centenary of the opening of the railway to Eltham, one article tells of how artists used the train to come to Eltham to paint or to live in Eltham and commute to art classes in Melbourne.

The other story Bird Days at Eltham is repeated below. Both articles were written by Russell Yeoman. For the Bird Days article Sue Law researched the information in "The Bird Lover" magazine at the State Library. Copies of the relevant articles from the magazine have been made for the Society's records.



## BIRD DAYS AT ELTHAM

During the 1960s Eltham Lower Park was the venue for the Gould League's bird days at which more than 1000 school children would spend the day away from their suburban classrooms. In 1959 the league switched the location of these springtime excursions from Toolern Vale to Eltham and by the end of the 60s there were three bird days each year to accommodate the large numbers of children.

Eltham Lower Park (formerly Eltham Park) is a large Crown land reserve beside the Diamond Creek near its junction with the Yarra River. Its environment is part natural bushland, part cleared parkland with sporting grounds. It has been set aside as parkland since the 1860s when it was used as a racecourse. Its vegetation and location at the junction of two bushland corridors make it an ideal bird watching venue.

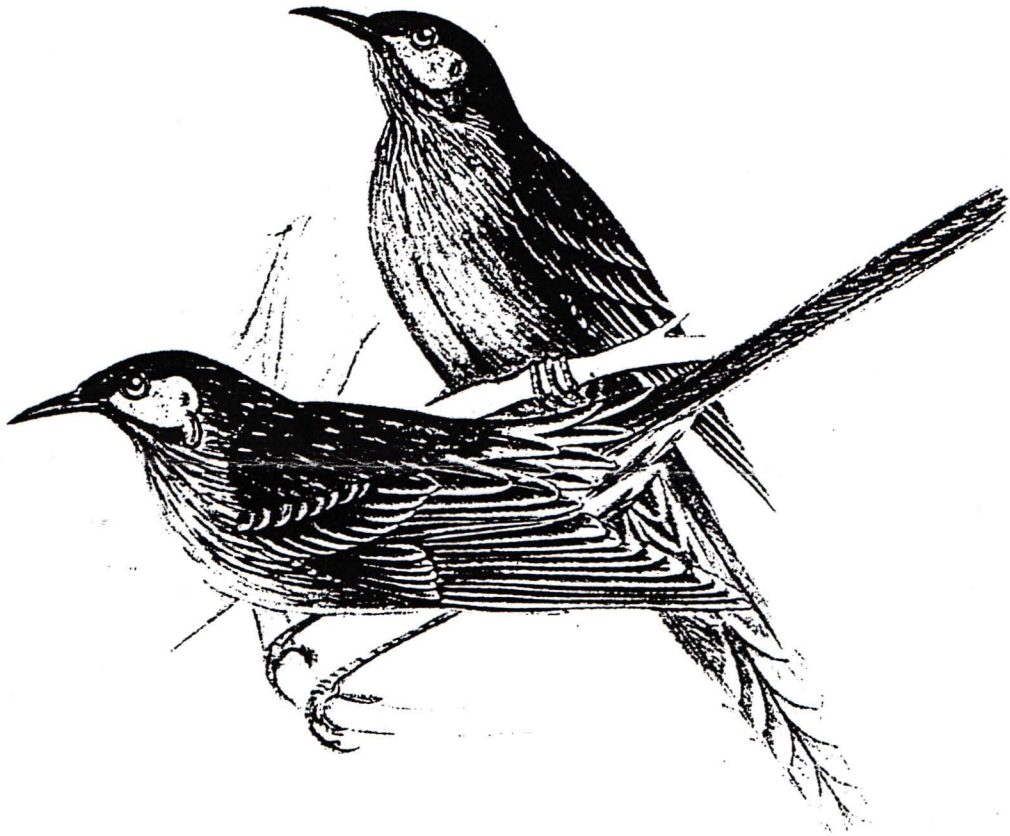
Children from metropolitan schools would come by bus on these day long excursions to "the bush". Each group would visit a number of stations where guides would describe the birds and perhaps nests to be seen. The events were stage managed to some extent and sometimes stuffed birds were strategically located. Alan Reid, now Patron of the Gould League recalls the time when a real life magpie lark approached the stuffed version of the same species and promptly pecked its head off.

These events were reported each year in the League's magazine "The Bird Lover". Usually the story was written by someone from one of the schools although the authors are mostly anonymous. In the 1960 edition of the magazine Garry Gatt, a Grade 5 pupil from Ringwood contributed the following poem.

### THE LULLABY OF ELTHAM

*As I was walking through the bush,  
I heard a melodious throng,  
The laughing of the kookaburra,  
And the thrush's merry song;  
The nattering of the old magpies,  
High up in the trees,  
Building lofty, scraggy nests,  
Among the fluttering leaves,  
And not the last and not the least,  
The loveliest song of all,  
The tinkling of the bell-bird –  
I love to hear his call.*

Much of Eltham is now quite suburban although a good tree canopy remains in most areas. Eltham Lower Park remains, surrounded by large treed residential blocks. It has been extended to the Yarra River and has links to other parks along both waterways. The bushland has been enhanced by planting of indigenous species by Nillumbik Council and the Friends of Diamond Creek. It continues to be an excellent bird watching venue but these days there is nothing on the scale of the Gould League Bird Days.



*Red Wattle-birds: Margo Pedersen: Private collection.  
Reports of the Gould League Bird Days often recorded sightings of Red Wattle-bird.*

## **THE WARDS OF NILLUMBIK**

With Council elections about to occur in Nillumbik attention is focussed on the newly adopted subdivision of the shire into electoral divisions called wards. Prior to the 1990's municipal restructuring the electoral divisions of cities were called wards and shires used the rather quaint term of ridings.

In the former Shire of Eltham the Central and West Ridings seemed ather mundane in terms of their names but the North Riding had a meaning and tradition of its own. This was the rural part of the shire and it is a reflection



of its significance that the North Riding restaurant (later Adams of North Riding) was established at St Andrews.

For this (and subsequent) elections Nillumbik has now been divided into nine wards, each of which will elect one councillor. The names of the wards have an historical basis; generally they are the name of an historical or locally significant property within the ward. An article in the Diamond Valley Leader of 20<sup>th</sup> February 2002 provides details of the nine wards including background to the naming. It is considered that some clarification is required in relation to the property or person after which or whom the ward is named.

For the time being we will just deal with the wards covering our main areas of interest from Eltham to Kangaroo Ground. At a future time we may write about all of the wards in more detail.

#### LENISTER WARD

This ward covers the southern part of Eltham extending along the north side of the Yarra River to the edge of North Warrandyte.

It is named after Lenister Farm a 4.5 ha (11.3 acre) Council owned property at the rear of Eltham Lower Park and situated at the junction of the Yarra River and the Diamond Creek. The land was originally purchased from the Crown by Henry Stooke who bought many parcels of the land at Eltham and Lower Plenty in the 1850's and 60's. He was Chairman of the Eltham District Road Board for many years in this period. Stooke did not live on the land and it was not until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century that there was a house on the land and the name Lenister Farm appeared.

#### WINGROVE WARD

This ward covers central Eltham. It is named after Charles Symons Wingrove who was Secretary of the Eltham District Road Board and later Eltham Shire Council for a combined period of 47 years extending from 1857 to 1904. During part of this time he was also Shire Engineer and was Secretary to Heidelberg Shire Council.

He was a leading figure in the Municipal Association of Victoria and at the time he retired he was recognized as the "grand old man" of Victorian local government.

Wingrove Cottage, built for C S Wingrove in 1858, remains on its site in Main Road opposite the park which bears his name but this location is outside Wingrove Ward.

#### EDENDALE WARD

This ward is the area of Eltham north and west of the railway extending through Eltham North to the South end of Diamond Creek.

It is named after Edendale Farm which is another Council owned property situated adjacent to the Diamond Creek at Eltham North. It is used by the Council as a community farm and environment centre. The house was built in 1896 for Thomas Cool, Club Manager of the Victoria Coffee Palace, Melbourne. Later owners included J. W. Cox, the Gaston family and D. Mummery. The building has been designated as being of local historical significance.

#### COLEMAN WARD

This ward covers Eltham East and Research.

It is named after Colemans Corner at the intersection of Main Road and Wattletree Road and the Coleman family who lived at this site for many years. A photo taken in about 1904 shows the Coleman family standing outside their newly completed cottage. That building was incorporated into a later house on the site and that was recently demolished to make way for a medium density housing development. A longer article about the Colemans and Colemans Corner appeared in Newsletter No. 131, March 2000.

#### YANAKIE WARD

This ward includes North Warrandyte, Kangaroo Ground and the whole of the eastern part of the shire to north of St. Andrews.

The reason for this name is not readily apparent. It is an Aboriginal word with no obvious connection with this area. It is also the name of a property at Kangaroo Ground but the significance of this property in relation to the ward name is not clear.



## WHAT ELSE

We are to be involved with a number of displays over the next two months and we intend to promote the centenary of the opening of the railway to Eltham whenever it is appropriate. Richard Schurmann continues with his project to bring a steam train to Eltham to celebrate the centenary itself in June. There have been some difficulties in finding someone with the organizational skills for this event but Richard is talking to a local service club about this aspect.

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The proposed historical display in the Eltham Town Square on 16<sup>th</sup> February was postponed because of other events at this location. It is now scheduled for Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March. Part of this display will be featuring the railway centenary.

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The Victorian Heritage Festival runs for two weeks from the end of March. The theme is "Beyond the Big Smoke". This fits very well with the coming of the railway to Eltham and the influence that it had on the development of Eltham as an artistic community. We will be assisting the Eltham Library with a Heritage Festival display which will also be based on this theme.

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The Nillumbik Festival of the Arts has been held over the past two weeks and has included music, plays, art displays and open studios. The item of most historical interest was intended to finish on 3<sup>rd</sup> March but has been extended for a further ten days. This is the art exhibition "Captured" in the Eltham Library Gallery curated by artist Jenni Mitchell. It features works by noted artists who have lived in the local area over the past century. Represented artists included Water Withers, Jo Sweatman, Justus Jorgensen, Clifton Pugh, Neil Douglas and many more. It is certainly worth a visit.

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Another event happening as this Newsletter is being prepared is the launch of Marguerite Marshall's book, "Nillumbik Now and Then" on 4<sup>th</sup> March. This small book is an updated and expanded version of Marguerite's 1980's publication "Eltham Shire – Historical Buildings People and Places".

It is now available from the Eltham Bookshop.

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Also during the time span of this Newsletter we will be commencing our display in the Eltham Library Gallery commemorating the centenary of the birth of Alan Marshall. This is to run for three weeks from 24<sup>th</sup> April. We are still seeking suitable material for this display including copies of books by Alan Marshall. Please contact Russell Yeoman if you can help. Members of Sandringham Historical Society are to visit the display on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April. They will also visit the Local History Centre.

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Forthcoming dates for records workshops at the Local History Centre are:

Mondays	9.30 am	March 18 <sup>th</sup> , April 15 <sup>th</sup> .
Tuesday	7.30pm	May 7 <sup>th</sup> .

Members and others wanting to research or view the Society's collection are welcome to come at those times.

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Harry Gilham  
President

Phone – 9439 1175

Russell Yeoman  
Secretary

Phone – 9439 9717

Gwen Orford  
Treasurer/ Membership Secretary

Phone – 9439 8642

34<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting- Wednesday March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2002

President's Report.

Another year of speakers and visits to other Societies who gave us insights into their interests in the historical past of this area.

The 'Thompson of Arnhem Land' video in February gave us a vision of the past which is still relevant in the reconciliation movement of today. Followed by the Banyule Heritage Study of Montmorency and Lower Plenty brought reminders to our members of how these areas have changed over the years.

The Hurstbridge railway night was in part an audience participation night, where memories of local train travelling were as in the past and even still in use for the safety of the service provided by the travellers in our area.

The Shire's Art Collection evening was interesting to relate the acquired items with the current collecting of this municipalities efforts to cover a broader collection of past and current artistic endeavours, by artists of the Shire in particular.

The War Memorial Park and the Tower of Remembrance at Garden Hill, Kangaroo Ground, was visited and the refurbishment of the site gave a significant lift to people who attended the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this 1926 heritage site.

The Governor of Victoria, John Landy, showed himself to be a worthy choice of the Council to have him officiate at the November 8<sup>th</sup> service at the Tower.

Slides of the Diamond Creek with most of the bridges as referral points was a reminder of what was here in the 1840's, is here now and needs preservation for the lifetime of the Valley's inhabitants for ever.

The 'break-up' at 728 Main Road (the Historic Centre) was an eat and chat evening enjoyed as usual by 'too much of a good thing.'

Conferences with other Societies were attended, our Family History support group have added more 'histories' into our collection.

A bid to enlarge the knowledge of "why our Parks are mainly named after people" is being undertaken with around a 100 word 'snapshot' to be added into our walk around Eltham maps.

The remainder of the Artist's Trail took us through to the Warrandyte area and the depiction of past features of the town/bridge/river are interesting to discover still in existence.

Again I thank Marion Yeoman for her gardening efforts at 728 with Russell in charge of the mower when needed.

The evolving Committee who have put up with me for the last nine years again deserve the total membership's thanks for keeping the focus of local history alive in Eltham.

Harry Gilham,  
President.

