

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

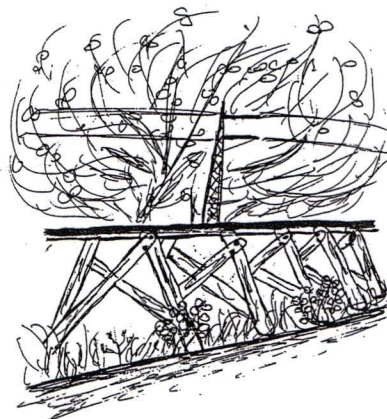
728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER NO. 157 JULY 2004

**NEXT MEETING
8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 14th JULY**

**SPEAKER PANEL
"ON THE HERITAGE TRAIL"**

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



ON THE HERITAGE TRAIL

In recent years heritage trails have taken on many forms. In the past the typical heritage trail was a walk around a country town with a map and notes from the local tourist information centre. Sometimes there would be commemorative plaques or information panels providing historical details. Trails of this type still exist and perform a valuable function. But in recent years there has been a significant expansion in types and roles of heritage trails.

They include long distance driving and walking trails, artists' trails, natural history trails, Internet based virtual trails to name just a few. For this meeting we have arranged for a small group of speakers to talk to us about local and other versions of an interesting variety of heritage trails.

Russell Yeoman will provide a brief overview of a number of trails, drawing on guide books and brochures for a wide range of types.

Dennis Ward will talk about his work developing local trails, initially based on Internet sites with the ultimate intention of establishing a walking trail with traditional signage. The Batman Trail along the Plenty River at Greensborough has an established web site. The Little Eltham Trail and another at Kangaroo Ground are in the early stages of development.

Katarina Persic is the team leader of the Cultural Section of Hobsons Bay Council. She has been responsible for the development of a trail around the foreshore of Williamstown and Altona. Its distinctive signage covers local heritage, environmental and artistic features.

Dennis and Katarina will present examples of their respective work by means of computer based slide shows.

ELTHAM MAJOR ACTIVITY CENTRE


As part of the State Government's Melbourne 2030 strategy Eltham (along with many other business centres) is identified as a major activity centre. The Council is required to produce a structure plan to guide future development of the centre. The activity centre has been defined to include the Eltham shopping centre and adjacent residential areas, the industrial area based on Bridge Street, parkland and the library precinct linking the two business areas, and the railway station area.

Nillumbik Council's consultants have prepared a draft report containing wide ranging recommendations on land use, urban design, community facilities and transport within this area. As a society most of the recommendations do not impact on our interests. However, some of the recommendations relate to heritage aspects and comment has been provided to the Council where these are considered to be detrimental to heritage interests.


The report recommends sale of the Eltham War Memorial site and seems to not fully recognize the significance of the site and its publicly funded memorial buildings. It has been put to the Council that the site should be retained in its current role although some alterations to the buildings and their use may be warranted.

Similarly, with the adjoining site of the former Eltham Shire Offices, we have opposed the recommended sale and, in particular, we support protection for the three Shillinglaw trees remaining on the site.

Other recommendations of concern include demolition of the old house at 66 Susan Street and alterations to the Alistair Knox Park which is subject to a heritage overlay and National Trust landscape classification.

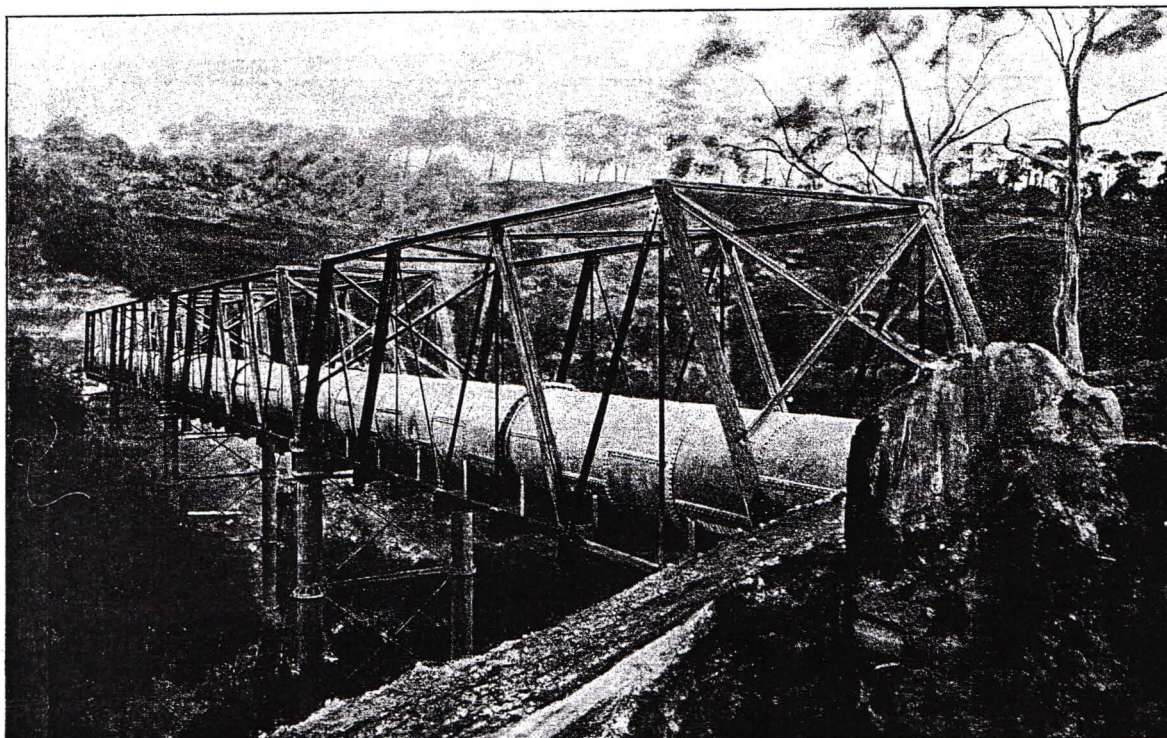


Maroondah Aqueduct across the Plenty River.



HE MAROONDAH AQUEDUCT crosses the Plenty River in a wrought iron pipe, 53 inches in diameter by 210 feet long.

This pipe is carried by an iron lattice girder of four spans, which is constructed of sufficient width and strength to carry another pipe similar to the existing one, when the aqueduct is completed to its full size, or double its present capacity.



Maroondah Aqueduct bridge over the Plenty River, Greensborough
Part of the Batman Trail
From Water Supply, Sewerage Etc, Photographic Views
Melbourne & Metropolitan Board of Works 1908

ELTHAM EAST CHOIR

The award-winning choir from Eltham East Primary School is working on a project involving songs about past and present local identities. The choir, directed by teacher Anne Williams, has received an Australia Council grant for the project which will involve the children researching and writing the words which will be put to music by a composer. The children have conducted a number of interviews to collect material on their local "heroes" and Society members have had a significant involvement. Jock Read has talked about his long life in Eltham. Russell Yeoman told them about writer Alan Marshall and Sue Law discussed Ena Jarvis who is remembered by several generations of Eltham children as their kindergarten teacher. Other subjects in this project include famous painter Walter Withers and racing driver Peter Brock.

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

The records of many students who attended the Eltham Primary School in Dalton Street are gradually being photocopied for the Society's use at our Local History Centre, 728 Main Road Eltham. We now have three large folders.

Book 1 is the Head Teachers' enrolments with student and parent's/guardian's name, father's occupation, age on admission, date of birth, qualifications on leaving and the attendance records of each student. These records from 1863 to 1913 contain names of just over 1000 students from the local area.

Book 2 contains the Examination Records for the School inspectors visits during the period of 1896 to 1904. These show each individual Student's name and their learning proficiency at the "class levels" of their primary education. These were set levels from 1 to 6 and in later years included the Merit Certificate of Primary Education.

Book 3. For more 'recent' students from 31-1-1939 to 3-2-1952 records of attendance, qualifications, even proposed secondary schools are available. Students total 718 enrolments over the 14 years.

Interested? Contact the Society through the names and phone numbers on the last page of this Newsletter.

Our next Newsletter will list the Cemetery Records held in our library and places to visit some smaller gravesites.

Harry Gilham

ALAN MARSHALL'S BUNGALOW

The Society has lodged an objection to a planning permit application to demolish the bungalow where noted writer Alan Marshall lived during nearly 20 years as an Eltham resident. The bungalow was located adjoining the house in Park Road (now Park West Road) owned by Alan's sister Elsie McConnell. This modest building is the subject of a heritage overlay in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme with a citation recognizing its important associations with this internationally known writer. Alan wrote most of his best known works during the time he lived there. Sometimes while he was writing he stayed in his caravan or in a shack on land he owned at Research. Other books were written in the Park Road bungalow, sometimes with the assistance of secretary Pat Wiltshire. Pat still lives in Eltham and has fond memories of her times working with Alan.

Alan's original bungalow was burnt down not long after the family moved to the property in 1955. It was quickly re-built as the building that stands today. The story is told by Alan in the *Argus* and quoted in his biography "I Can Jump Oceans" by Harry Marks (Nelson 1976).

I have often imagined myself being 'burnt out' and I have sometimes discussed with friends what, in this event, I would try and save.

I had a valuable and beautiful dilly bag made by an Arnhem Land black from parrot feathers and I thought to myself I would certainly grab that. Yet when the moment for doing this arrived I completely forgot the dilly bag and found myself heaving books through the window.

I watched my wireless burn completely unmoved, yet I thrust my hand almost into flames to grab an ash tray featuring a blue donkey against a yellow background.

Two weeks later, again in the Argus:

I want to take time off today to thank a lot of people. A fortnight ago my studio was burnt, together with my belongings, and being, as I realize, a very foolish man, I had not insured the building or the contents.

Such an experience in such circumstances makes a man feel very lonely, to say the least of it, and I felt lost and inadequate.

Then letters started rolling in, and now they are piled on my desk in front of me, a magic heap of friendship in paper and ink that I will always treasure.

They came from all over Australia – from outback places, from townships and cities, from old people who wrote their kind thoughts in a crabbed hand, to children who offered, in one case, a pup, in laborious crooked writing.

People I had never met sent me cheques, notes, books, and offers of help that took from my fire all its horrible associations and made it seem of little importance beside the noble qualities they revealed in their letters.

A group of Melbourne friends organised an evening for my benefit, and the money they raised, together with the amounts I received personally, enabled me to rebuild my studio.

Now, a fortnight later, I am sitting in the new building writing.

This amazing feat was achieved by an Eltham carpenter I know as 'Sid', a tall, lean man with a twinkle in his eye, and swift, efficient hands. In 10 days he finished it.

Jim Hill, a neighbouring writer, cleaned the debris of the fire away, and Ron Bradbrook, another neighbour, planted a garden in front of the new building.

It is not the same as it was before, since the shelves are empty, but it is a far lovelier place.

It now represents the unselfishness and kindness of those people who made its rebuilding possible.

It would not be there only for them.

I THANK THEM WITH ALL MY HEART.

The Council's heritage consultant Helen Lardner has been asked to prepare an assessment of the heritage significance of the bungalow and the Society has assisted with the research. Preliminary indications are that the level of significance will be much higher than the local significance previously attributed to it. The Council is yet to make a decision on the application.

ROBERT BRUCE NESS 1917 - 2004

Bruce Ness who died on 28 June came from a pioneer Kangaroo Ground family and has been heavily involved in the community and local history of the area over many years. Bruce and his wife Joy have been members of our Society since its foundation in 1967. Bruce has been Vice-President and served on the committee for a long period. He provided storage in his barn for items collected by the Society and was a driving force for the establishment of a museum which ultimately became the Andrew Ross Museum. His other involvements in the community included the Presbyterian Church, cemetery trust and as Captain of the Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade.

In recent times poor health has meant that Bruce and Joy had to sell the family farm "View Hill" and move to Leith Park at St. Helena. On behalf of members of our Society, our deepest sympathy is extended to Joy and other members of the family.

In 1989 Joy wrote a brief history of the Ness family for our records and it is appropriate to include it here in full.

"Victoria and its Metropolis 1888" includes among its entries:

"James Johnston was born in Aberdeenshire in 1812. Arriving in Melbourne in 1840, and spending 12 months on the Plenty River and another 12 months on Darebin Creek, he went to the Kangaroo Ground where he rented a farm from Mr Donaldson for 7 years."

At the first land sales in Kangaroo Ground in 1849, James Johnston bought 160 acres, also 60 adjoining acres. He established a farm which he named "Pretty Hill", building himself a two storey home of stone quarried from a site opposite what was later to be Wellers Hotel.

Each day he carted a load of stone away, watched by young Betsy Sadler who lived opposite the quarry, on a property now known as "Ingleside".

"There goes another load of stone for my house" said Betsy jokingly. Imagine her surprise when the house was finished to be asked by James "Wilt thou be mistress of "Pretty Hill" Betsy?" "That I will, Johnston" answered Betsy.

During the 1860's James' nephew, James Mess came out from Scotland to visit him. He never went back. He met Jane Stevenson (born 1840, daughter of Joseph Stevenson), fell in love with her and married her in 1863.

He took up land in 1867, adjacent to the present day Ness Lane, calling his farm "View Hill". He applied for a license to plant a five acre vineyard on the eastern slope of the farm. This license is still in our possession.

James Mess built a house of bricks handmade from clay quarried from the property. The hole is still to be seen on the top of the hill. The house foundations were of stone, also

quarried from the property. The kitchen was separate from the house, as was the custom in those days, as a precaution against fire. It was made of slabs, with a floor of large stones, a large open fireplace with a cast iron wood burning stove alongside. As the family grew, a separate timber building of a dining room and a bedroom was built nearby. These had tongue and groove pine lining – the dining room with a coved ceiling. This room is now incorporated with our present home. Adjoining was a small office used as a State Savings Bank agency.

The Bank agency was run, at a later date by one of James' daughter, Ruth (Ettie) (Mrs Gosling) who having been widowed and left with three small children, had come home to live with her parents. She also taught at Kangaroo Ground school as a sewing mistress.

In 1867 part of James Thompson's farm "Garden Hill" was auctioned. James bought 70 acres of the "Garden Hill" portion, west of where the War Memorial now stands. The neighbours laughed at him, saying he paid too much for it. However it was of beautiful volcanic black soil, which would grow anything. The hill itself is an extinct volcano.

James and Jane had nine children –

William b.1864	George b.1875
Joseph b.1865	Alexanda b.1877
Isabella b. 1868	Janet b.1880
James Johnson b.1871	Robert David b.1885
Ruth (Ettie) b.1872	

There was a lot of tragedy in the family. Joseph died of blood poisoning after an accident with a saw. George when only 16 years old was killed in an explosion while handling dynamite caps, and Janet died of typhoid fever when she was 26. James senior while walking across paddocks at night to visit his uncle stepped into a hole and fell, breaking his neck and dying instantly. He was not found until the next day.

The family farmed the two properties "Garden Hill" and "View Hill". On "Garden Hill" there were already, at the time James bought it, extensive barns, stables and a smithy. There was also a cottage, built of prefabricated sections brought out from Scotland. On the "Garden Hill" farm were grown crops of oats, wheat, maize and vegetables, which won many prizes at the Heidelberg and Diamond Creek Agricultural Shows. There was a dairy herd. Separated cream was sent to Melbourne by train from Wattle Glen station from 1912, then known as Bally. The skim milk was fed to pigs. The soil was worked by Clydesdale horses, which were bred on the property.

Robert David was the only member of the Mess family to carry on the family name which he changed to Ness. He married in 1915 Pearl, daughter of William and Sabina Mills, who had an orchard at Wattle Glen. Pearl and Robert D. had four children – Robert Bruce (b.1917), Beryl (b.1919), Vera (b.1923) and Donald (b.1928).

All generations of the Ness family have been very community minded, involved with the Kangaroo Ground Presbyterian Church, the school, fire brigade (formed in 1892), the hall committee, cemetery trust, and tennis club. Robert David also belonged to the gun club and roller skating club at the hall. In 1946 Robert David was made a J.P.

In the 1920's a corner of "Garden Hill" was purchased by the Eltham Council and a stone cairn erected in memory of the fallen in World War I. In 1926 the present memorial was

built in the style of a Scottish watch tower. The stone for it was donated by Professor and Dr. Osborne from their property.

Three generations of the Ness family have been educated at Kangaroo Ground State School, and sixth generation descendants of Joseph Stevenson still reside in the Eltham North Riding.

The old homestead has long since been demolished, but Robert Bruce Ness and his wife Joy still reside at "View Hill".

The property has several times been burnt in bushfires, the buildings narrowly escaping destruction, particularly in the 1962 and 1969 fires.

MORE NEWS

The Annual Luncheon of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies will be held on Saturday 31 July and members are welcome to attend. The venue will be Schwerkolt Cottage at Nunawading and the hosts are Whitehorse Historical Society. Guest speaker will be Clarrie Talbot of Knox Historical Society on 150 Years of Railways. The cost is \$8.00. Tell Gwen Orford if you are going or RSVP to Marion Tremlett on 9729 9959.

Our next Committee meeting has been changed from 10 to 17 August. Talk to a Committee member if you have any business that you think should be discussed. The next records workshops at the Local History Centre at

Mondays 9.30am 19 July, 16 August.

Tuesdays 7.30pm 3 August, 7 September

Members are encouraged to attend these workshops.

Don't forget that subscriptions for 2004/5 are due as from 1 July. Full details of subs are provided in the last Newsletter or in the membership renewal form. If you have not yet paid send your subs to our post office box or pay at the July meeting.

A noticeable absentee from our meetings in recent times has been Geof Braithwaite. Members have commented that they miss his words of wisdom on past local events which were based on many years of observing the happenings of our area. Geof and his wife Flora have retired to Torquay where they recently celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. Our congratulations go out to them on this remarkable achievement.

At the May meeting Nigel Lewis and Carlotta Kellaway presented a most detailed and interesting account of their research into Wingrove Cottage and their conclusions on its heritage significance. Despite their excellent work the owner seems to be moving very slowly on the release of the conservation plan which was a requirement that followed from the unauthorised demolition of part of the building.

Harry Gilham
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