

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER

NO. 158 SEPTEMBER 2004

NEXT MEETING

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 8th SEPTEMBER

VIDEO PRESENTATION

"MAIN STREAM MELBOURNE"

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE

LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM

(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)



BATMAN TRAIL EXCURSION

SUNDAY 10 OCTOBER



HURSTBRIDGE WATTLE FESTIVAL

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER



SEPTEMBER MEETING

There has been some re-arrangement of our meeting program and the talk by Heath Paynter on the Bohemian aspect of Eltham life has been deferred until next year.

Screensound Australia has recently launched the video project which is titled "Main Stream Melbourne: The River Yarra on Film" and we have purchased a copy for the Society. The complete video runs for 130 minutes and includes the Tim Burstall short film "The Prize". While this is too long for our normal meeting program we think that the subject matter is worth a group screening and so we will show an edited version. It may be that the balance is worth showing at a later meeting.

The main content of the video is the river's role in supplying water for Melbourne, the old and new face of tourism in the Yarra Valley, recreational use of the Yarra above Dights Falls; and major landmarks – past and present – on or near the river.

Footage from more than 90 films and almost 200 photographs have been used to produce this historical record of the upper and middle sections of the river and its environs – from the Baw Baw Plateau to the Johnston Street Bridge. The earliest footage used dates back to 1910. Melbourne broadcaster Paul Higgins provides a detailed commentary.

The Yarra River is a major feature of our local area as well as being the "Main Stream" of Melbourne. This project is an important contribution to our local historical information.

BATMAN TRAIL EXCURSION

As part of the speaker panel at our July meeting, Dennis Ward took us on a virtual excursion along the Plenty River at Greensborough with a slide show presentation of the Batman Trail. Many of our members have not actually visited the sites that Dennis referred to and so we have organized an excursion to provide an opportunity to do that. The excursion will be structured so that those who wish to can walk the length of the trail. Alternatively, others can drive to several selected locations where a short walk will be required to visit trail sites. Commentary on the historical significance of each site will be provided by Dennis. They will include evidence to show that Batman's famous treaty with local aboriginal leaders was signed on the banks of the Plenty River and the interesting story of the Batman apple tree which survives near where the old Maroondah Aqueduct crosses the river.

The excursion date is Sunday 10th October. The trail excursion will commence at 1.00pm in Plenty River Drive Greensborough beneath the high bridge of the Greensborough By-pass (Melway Ref. 10 JH). Anyone needing transport should ring Russell on 9439 9717.

The other heritage trail discussed at the July meeting was the Hobsons Bay Coastal Trail. A small group excursion can be arranged for anyone interested. Contact Russell for more information.

PRESIDENT'S NOTES

'Lest we forget'; words held in reverence to those who died in the services in Australia's war commitments held no sway with six Nillumbik Councillors at their meeting on August 18th 2004.

Council by a 6-3 vote decided that the WWII Garden of Remembrance, together with its Baby Health Centre of 1952, the Pre-School Centre of 1956 and the Children's Library Hall 1961 on land purchased by the War Memorial Trust of 1945 to 1966, was seen to be available for sale to "market forces". The area is in Main Road – west side – beside the Eltham Fire Station. The Eltham Senior Citizens Centre was built on a corner of the land resulting in transfer of the land to Eltham Council to satisfy Government funding requirements of the 1960s.

It was in March 1945 that the Eltham District Progress Association called a meeting of local people who in turn set up and registered the War Memorial Trust. As a focus the notice paper read:-

'Those who have had a member of their family in the fighting services will want to see that the form of a memorial we are concerned with is the one which will be a constant reminder to us of those who fought for us and the little ones for whom they fought and died.'

Shame councillors, shame – this decision must be reversed before more heritage damage is done.

Harry Gilham

ALAN MARSHALL'S BUNGALOW

We reported in the last newsletter that a planning permit application had been made to demolish the bungalow at Park West Road, Eltham which was once the home of noted writer Alan Marshall. The application has now been withdrawn by the owners and so the bungalow is safe for the time being. It remains in poor condition and warrants some action to assist the owners to properly maintain it. That is something for the Council and/or our Society or others to consider as to what assistance can be offered.

Nillumbik Council commissioned a report by heritage consultants HLCD Pty. Ltd. to assist it in assessing the application. The report was prepared by Helen Lardner and Samantha Westbrooke from material researched by historian Dr Carlotta Kellaway. It concluded that the bungalow should not be demolished because it is considered to be of State significance. It recommended nomination to the Victorian Heritage Register.

The report includes a preliminary statement of significance as follows:-

The Alan Marshall Bungalow at Eltham has State and local historical and social significance for the following reasons.

The Alan Marshall Bungalow has State (and possibly national) historical significance for its strong associations with the notable Australian author, Alan Marshall, for whom it was built, and who lived and worked there from 1955 to 1972. This was an important period in Marshall's literary life when he wrote his much-loved autobiographical trilogy. In 1989 Marshall was awarded the Order of Australia for his Services to Literature. Marshall also played a significant role as a disabled person himself in always encouraging and furthering the advancement of the disabled. In 1972 he was awarded an OBE for his services to the disabled.

The bungalow has State (and possibly national) social significance for the literary and artistic community as a place where Marshall entertained some of Victoria's (and Australia's) most prominent writers, artists and journalists.

The Alan Marshall Bungalow also has ongoing social significance to the local community because it is a symbol of Alan's long association with the district over more than 50 years during which he wrote a history of Eltham. Marshall was a local celebrity whose life has been celebrated by the memorial sculpture outside the Eltham Library and the annual Shire of Eltham (now Nillumbik) Alan Marshall Short Story Competition. The bungalow continues to be widely recognised by the local community as the 'Alan Marshall Bungalow', and is the focus of guided tours and historical interest.

The report includes a brief history of Alan's life which contains material that most members would have read in our newsletter or elsewhere. However, the section headed "Life in the Eltham Bungalow" is worth repeating here.

The years in which Marshall lived and worked in the Eltham bungalow were fruitful ones in which, as has been discussed earlier, he completed his famous trilogy, wrote articles for the Argus and wrote his history of Eltham. He also wrote many short stories, which are among his most popular works.

Marshall has been described as a "master of a particularly Australian kind of fiction...the yarn, or anecdote, usually about an aspect of traditional life in the bush he loved". His lifelong friend and fellow author, Judah Waten, described Marshall's style as,

'without being old-fashioned or parochial, he was very much in the best tradition of Australian short story writing. He was one of the last of an earlier generation of democratic humanist writers'.

Pat Wiltshire was Marshall's secretary from 1962 to 1972, and typed everything Marshall wrote in those years. She described how cosy the Eltham bungalow was when Marshall lived there and its seagrass mat on the floor, Marshall's desk, a fold-out table for the typewriter, the filing cabinet and bookcases crammed with books. The walls were covered with Aboriginal artifacts collected during his travels and paintings by some of his famous friends, such as Noel Counihan and Louis Kahan.

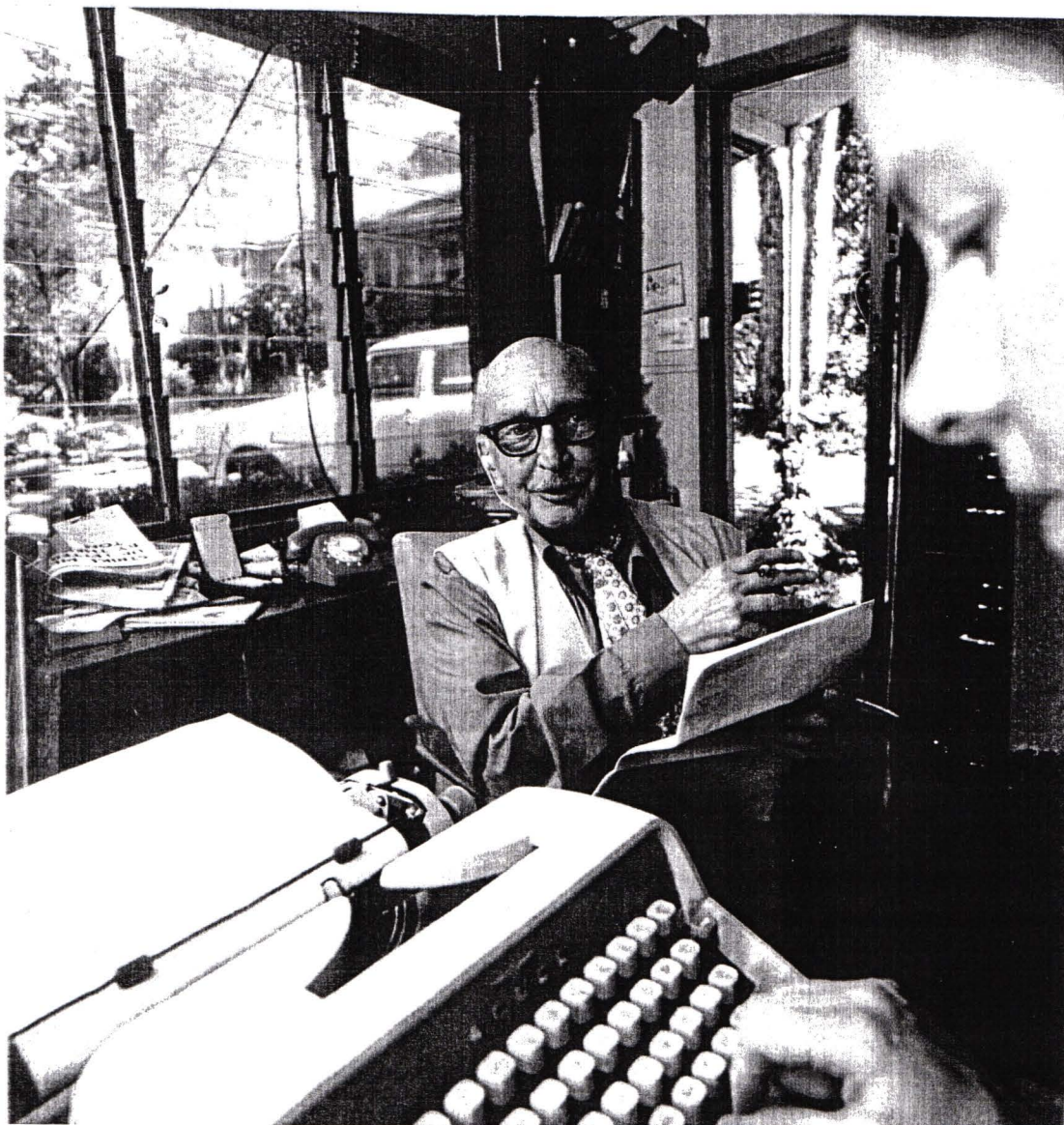
She tells how everything in the bungalow was meticulously neat and tidy, just as Marshall was himself. She describes him as a 'jaunty dresser, always with a small bow tie'. This room, as it was when Marshall was working there, can be seen in a coloured photograph held by the Eltham Historical Society. Marshall is dictating from a manuscript to Pat, who is sitting at the typewriter. The author's desk covered with papers stands by a window, which looks out into the garden and towards his sisters' house. Pat remembers how Alan Marshall used to love to sit out on his small verandah, which had a bird bath nearby, looking at the trees and the bush birds.

Many visitors came to the Eltham bungalow to sit and chat and to listen to Marshall read his stories. According to Pat, he was 'always interested in people and in the

arts'. She describes him as a 'magnet', who had 'visitors from all over the world'. His visitors included the writers Judah Waten, John Morrison, Bill Wannon and Clem Christesen.

A particularly close friend was the important Australian author, Xavier Herbert. Herbert's own modest timber-framed cottage, purchased by him in 1951, where he 'worked on all of his major works except *Capricornia*', has been added to the Queensland State Register. This house has had substantial modifications since the Herberts' time and the writer's shed in the backyard was demolished in 1995-96.

Tapes have survived of Alan Marshall's readings from *I Can Jump Puddles* to friends in the Eltham bungalow. Copies of these tapes are held by the Eltham Historical Society.



ALAN AT WORK AT HIS ELTHAM HOME
WITH SECRETARY, PAT WILTSHIRE

Alan Marshall was a well-known figure around the Eltham district and often drove about in his 1930 model Dodge. According to one account,

'You'd think a cripple couldn't manage but he'd had it changed so that he could push the clutch with a stick arrangement when needing to change gears, and he had something fixed to the brake also so that he could brake. He was quite a good driver.'

HURSTBRIDGE WATTLE FESTIVAL

Nillumbik historical societies have agreed to take part in the Hurstbridge Wattle Festival on Sunday 5th September. The festival will take place at Allwood House at the corner of Main Road and Arthurs Creek Road between 10.00am and 5.00pm. A steam train will run to Hurstbridge for the occasion which is based on the Wattle Day excursions of many years ago.

Harry Gilham is co-ordinating a small display by our society. Members who can assist with setting up or minding the display for any period during the day are asked to contact Harry.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Nillumbik Historical Society is arranging a three day excursion to Gippsland taking in Walhalla, Bairnsdale, Cowarr and many other places en route. The dates are 3rd, 4th and 5th November and the cost of \$275 includes transport, accommodation and meals. Ring Frank Phipps on 9438-1463 if you are interested.

At our November meeting Russell Yeoman will show slides of significant trees, gardens and wildflowers – all important components of our local flora. As part of the Nillumbik Living and Learning Centres program, Russell is leading a walk on Sunday 24th October looking at significant trees around Eltham. This will be a full day walk and expert commentary on the trees will be provided by John Anderson. Ring the Eltham Living and Learning Centre on 9439-3463 if you are interested.

The Society continues to accumulate more and more material for our records. There are regular donations of photos, various snippets of information arrive in the mail and a few members provide material from their family or local history research. All of this is most welcome but adds to the backlog of properly cataloguing the information so that it can be readily found in the future. Further assistance will be required from members if we are to make significant inroads into the backlog of filing and recording information. Members are urged to come along to our records workshops over the next few months. These will be held on the following dates:-

Mondays 9.30am
Tuesdays 7.30pm

20th September, 18th October.
7th September, 5th October.

Harry Gilham
President

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Russell Yeoman
Secretary

Phone - 9439 9717

Gwen Orford
Treasurer /
Membership Secretary
Phone 9439 8642