

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER

NO. 173 MARCH 2007

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 11TH MARCH

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE

LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM

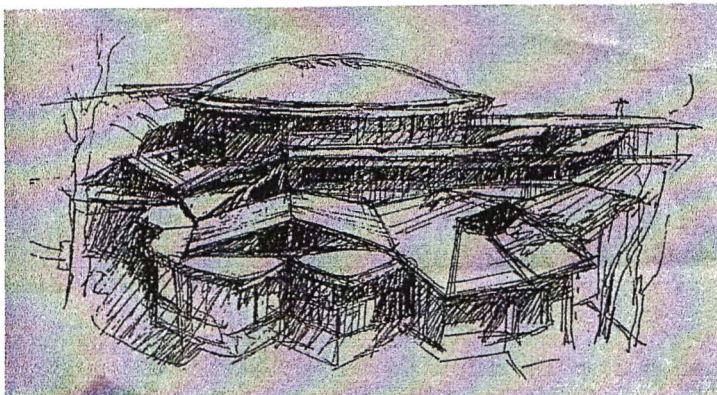
(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)

GUEST SPEAKER GRAEME BUTLER

NILLUMBIK HERITAGE STUDY

- RECENT INVESTIGATIONS

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**HISTORICAL WALKS
PROGRAM**

SATURDAY 5 MAY

**2 PM AT ELTHAM LOCAL
HISTORY CENTRE
BOOKINGS 9439 9717**

Eltham Library. Recently added to the heritage overlay and featured in our historic walks program.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Our March meeting each year is the Annual General Meeting which includes the presentation of annual reports and the election of office bearers for the coming year. The official notification of the AGM and the agenda were published in the January Newsletter.

As always we are encouraging members to contribute to the operation of the Society by becoming an office bearer or committee member. Please give this some thought and, if in doubt, discuss it with one of our present office bearers. We warmly welcome fresh ideas and enthusiastic participation in the tasks involved in running our organisation.

Please note that in accordance with the rules of the Society, written nominations received prior to the AGM take precedence over those received at the meeting.

GRAEME BUTLER

There are now some 250 places listed in the heritage overlay to the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. These places are included for heritage value at a local (or higher) level and are afforded protection in that a planning permit is required for demolition or alteration. Most are houses or other buildings but the list includes bridges, trees and even a park landscape.

Seventy of the places have interim protection at this stage and are going through the process of a planning scheme amendment intended to result in their permanent protection. Some of these are the results of earlier work, particularly the Shire of Eltham Heritage Study and had not previously been protected pending further investigation.

Others are the result of more recent work in the various stages of the Nillumbik Heritage Study. Graeme Butler has been the principal heritage consultant to Nillumbik Council for most of these assessments. He is ideally placed to talk to us about some of the more interesting individual assessments and the research involved in establishing the heritage credentials of these places. Graeme's talk will be illustrated with computer images.

Members and visitors are invited to stay for supper after the meeting. Mary Regan regularly organizes the supper at our meetings and we owe her a debt of gratitude for her quiet work in the background.

SCHOOL DAYS IN ELTHAM

Jeff Prentice who grew up in Eltham is a recent member of our Society. In response to last years 150th anniversary of Eltham Primary School he wrote a delightful piece about his school days. It was a little too late to be included in "We Did Open a School in Little Eltham" but it is too good to simply file away, so here it is.

School Days at Eltham Primary

Childhood recollections can at times be quite vivid and revealing, especially when the mind sparks memories of an idyllic existence, as was the case with my days roaming the Eltham hills. My own memories of Eltham Primary – bubs to Grade Six (1946-1952) live with me today.

Walking to school with my brothers, Ern and Laurie down the Arthur Street hill, across the old wooden bridge spanning the creek, along the gravel stretch of Bible Street to the Dalton Street school was a daily occurrence. Mostly we walked but later on rode our bikes in the hot summers and cold frosty winters, growing up in a country town, now no

more. Eltham is today a bustling suburb of Melbourne and Main Street has very little left of a village as we kids remembered it.

As country bumpkins we had our moments when school was not our preferred destination, but we were a happy-go-lucky bunch, revelling in Aussie Rules football and cricket matches – hail, rain or shine! On a few occasions I wagged school and was double-dinked on John Arnaud's bike down to the Diamond Creek for the day, only to get the cuts the following morning. I don't think my parents were too perturbed about the occasional diversion from school work.

Eltham Primary was indeed a country school in the 1940s-1950s – isolated to some extent from the hustle and bustle of city and suburban life even though the town was only 16 miles from Melbourne. Nonetheless we remained unsophisticated kids, wandering the grass paddocks and playing cowboys and itchy-bums among the tea-tree or playing in the dams along the creek, looking for yabbies. We were content in our backyard, looking after chooks, milking cows morning and night – chores we had to do. The township of Eltham had a village atmosphere and everybody knew each other. Some school mates I remember were: Alan Pitman; Chris Jarvis, Ken Docherty; Max Forster (his mother taught me music); Ian Lyons, whose father owned the local garage; Sydney Stevenson, living down the Arthur Street hill; and David 'Ding Dong' Bell. Playing marbles in the dirt playground at school was a pleasant pastime as was collecting football and cricket cards, us kids raiding the Weeties, Crispies and Malties packets when Burgoyne's truck turned up with the groceries.

In the Spring we had to contend with swooping, manic magpies on the way to school or in the winter months watch out for gangs who wanted to bash us as we walked home. Few fights eventuated, mostly bravado talk. There was definitely antipathy between us and the Catholic school kids, such was the strong religious beliefs in the community in those days. For me, tolerance reigned so our neighbourhood friends were George and John Caufield who attended the Catholic school. We got on extremely well as we grew up together.

Our home, 'Braidwood', was on the east side of town at the end of the Arthur Street hill and situated on a sloping hillside of eleven acres. At the top of the hill were the Jelbart family, parents Ron and Yvonne and sons Kim and Ian and daughter Meredith. To the west was Adlington's paddock where mushrooms flourished in the Autumn. Up Luck Street and over Bible Street a backtrack led to our house and this was our preferred route home from the Eltham township. Walking alone, even at night, was not a fear for us kids but how things have changed today for children as parents need to be more protective.

Miss Martin, who was our Infant teacher, made sure we knew how to read, write and spell. Sometimes in the summer months we would sit outside in the sandpit to read our Victorian readers, learning poems by Henry Lawson and Henry Kendall. I can still remember the bitterly cold winter months, making excuses to sit next to the open fires either end of the Infant classroom. By Grades Three and Four we were taught by Mrs Kelly, followed by Stan Jobbing, the headmaster, who taught us in Grades Five and Six. The pre-fab was our classroom by 1952 – bloody hot in summer! In the winter months we had mugs of cocoa at morning play and marched into the classroom with the sound of Colonel Bogie.

As kids we could be cheeky at times and on our way home from school tease Metho Mick, a local character who swore back at us from a distance. He slept in the sports pavilion down at the Eltham oval, a wretched figure, an outcast from the community.

In the original sandstone sedimentary rock section of the school, there was a small library behind the front door, but many of the books were of no interest to us – mostly

Whitcombe & Tombs Vivid readers. If Stan Jobbing was in a good mood he would read to us an exciting adventure story. From my primary school days, I developed a strong interest in books and reading and later on writing. Maybe Miss Martin's teaching gave me the foundation to revel in literature. Whatever, books remain a large part of my life's interest.

Jeff Prentice

MOOR-RUL VIEWING PLATFORM

There have been further delays with the completion of the Moor-rul viewing platform adjacent to the Memorial Tower at Kangaroo Ground. As a result, our excursion to Kangaroo Ground listed in our program for April will again be deferred. The platform is now scheduled to be completed in late April and we hope to run our excursion in May. Details will be given in the May Newsletter.

The platform includes eight double sided interpretive panels setting out Aboriginal and European history of the area and also details of local geology, flora and fauna. These panels feature high quality graphic design and professionally written text. The subjects covered are:

- ***"Womin Je Ka" Welcome***
- ***The Kulin Nation***
- ***Singing, Dancing, Ceremony, Celebration***
- ***This Country, My Home***
- ***The Highland Taken***
- ***Auld Lang Syne "Same Land Different Views"***
- ***Working the Land***
- ***Food from the Earth or "Earth's Harvest"***
- ***Lest We Forget, "And with the going down of the Sun (3 panels)***
- ***This Black Earth***
- ***Those other indigenous inhabitants - Kangaroo Ground's Wildlife***
- ***Silent Witnesses - Kangaroo Ground's White Manna Gums***
- ***Belonging***
- ***A Place of Reverence and A Tower of Strength***

HERITAGE WALKS

The Saturday Heritage Walks which began in 2005, continued through 2006 and again a feature of the Society's 2007 program, have been highly successful with an average attendance of nine people. Nine walkers participated in last Saturday's walk despite a predicted temperature of 36 degrees. Most bookings result from promotion of the Heritage Walks in the Diamond Valley Leader Newspaper's 'what's on' column.

Russell has lead most of the walks with Harry on hand providing additional information and always available in Russell's absence. The walks take approximately two hours with frequent stops at places of particular historic interest – with information supplied by Russell and Harry and many early photos from the Society's collection passed around.

At the conclusion of the walks the walkers are pleased to stop off at the Local History Centre for a rest and afternoon tea and a look through the Centre's records and photos. Many thanks to Sue Law and Mary Regan for preparing a most welcome afternoon tea.

The walks will now be held on a two monthly basis with the next one being on 5th May. And don't forget our records workshops which will be held on the following dates:

Mondays 9.30 am
Tuesdays 7.30 pm

19th March
3rd April

16th April
1st May

ELTHAM LOWER PARK HISTORY.

The following item was written by Russell Yeoman for use by Nillumbik Council in relation to its Eltham Lower Park Masterplan. There has been some minor editing to make it more relevant to our Society Newsletter.

Prior to the extension of European settlement into the lands of Nillum-bik in the late 1830s the Wurundjeri people had been meeting in the area now known as Eltham Lower Park for thousands of years. Waterway junctions had a particular attraction as tribal meeting places and the junction of the Diamond Creek with the Yarra River (Birrarung to the Wurundjeri) was one such important location in terms of aboriginal culture. The sculpture "Not Just a Pretty Place" by Aleks Danko and located near the junction of these two watercourses pays tribute to this important cultural location.

The first European settlers were squatters or leaseholders and itinerants such as timber workers. Records of their occupation are sketchy but the Eltham Lower Park area was probably included within the pastoral run established in 1841 by Henry Foley. He sold his leasehold in 1845 to Joseph Wilson who in turn sold it to Frederick Falkiner soon after.

During the late 1840s the colonial government was subdividing land within the parish of Nillumbik for sale. The survey was based on a mile square grid. An area of about one square mile was set aside on the north bank of the Yarra as a future village and was later named Eltham. The Diamond Creek ran through the centre of the village reserve. The village was not immediately made available for sale and Falkiner's continued occupation of the reserve drew complaints from nearby land owners.

As it happened the area north of the village reserve developed more quickly by way of a private subdivision and land sales within the village proceeded slowly over many years. An 1850 plan of the village showing the first allotments to be sold shows the Eltham Lower Park area simply as thick scrub. From the early 1850s horse racing meetings were held on 10 acres of land partly cleared by the residents. In 1856 the newly formed Eltham District Road Board sent a petition to the Surveyor General of the Colony of Victoria requesting that an area of 36 acres of Crown land be reserved for a race course and recreation. The Government did not act quickly. An 1860 plan showing more detail of the developing village reserve shows the park area as a proposed race course reserve. Other notations on this plan show that the present pony club area was swampy, the Homestead Road area was a high stringybark range and there were rich flats in the Lenister Farm area.

Gazetted as a race course and recreation ground occurred in 1865. A further 10 acres were added in 1866 and a further 12 acres (Hohnes Hill) were added in 1870. In 1866 a two acre site on the banks of the creek was gazetted as a pound reserve and today this forms part of the park. In 1870 the pound keeper was William Walsh.

Government plans show the changing use of the park with various gazettals under different titles. By 1877 it was called a public park which perhaps indicated that horse racing was in decline by that time. However Jock Read can remember that the last horse race was in 1926 and training continued through the 1920s. The connection with horse riding has continued. In the mid 1900s a circuit road around the park was used for trotting training. In 1953 the Eltham Pony Club was established to cater for the significant local population of young people with horse riding interests. Diana-Bassett-Smith was involved in the formation of the club. She says that it was and still is an excellent recreational facility for the youth of the area. In those days the club used a larger area of the park with a cross country course on Hohnes Hill. From the mid 1950s the club held the Eltham

Easter Fair at the park Later the fair was named ERSILAC and included a procession along Main Road from the town centre to the park.

The park's mix of bushland environment, more formal park facilities and sporting grounds has proved very popular over many years. The large pine trees near the main entrance to the park indicate a trend of formal tree planting going back many years. The park was used by picnic parties from the local area and on excursions from the inner suburbs. A group known as the Eltham Campers had an annual weekend excursion to the park. To cater for park visitors there were businesses on the opposite side of Main Road selling picnic provisions and early photos indicate that they displayed big signs advertising hot water.

In the 1960s the park was the venue for school bird days organized by the Gould League. Bus loads of school children came to the park from suburban schools and by the mid 60s the large numbers necessitated three separate days. The excursions were reported in the League's magazine "The Bird Lover".

The Diamond Valley Miniature Railway is a significant feature of the park today and certainly is a major attraction for visitors to the park. The railway moved to the park in 1961 from its original location in Ivanhoe. Since that time it has significantly expanded its track network and its occupancy of the site has been recognized by the State Government in passing the Eltham Land Act.

The park has been used over many years for various sporting activities including cricket, football and lacrosse. In the 1970s a modern new pavilion was built to accommodate the various sporting clubs. The nature of the park makes it ideal for orienteering at a school level.

The park is Crown land that has generally been under some form of Council control since the formation of the Eltham Shire Council in 1871. In 1970 the Council was formally appointed as a committee of management under the Land Act. Lenister Farm has a different status. This former private property was purchased by the Council in 1979 and provides a link between the park and the Yarra River. This small farm lot of about 11 acres on the Eltham village reserve was purchased from the Crown in 1862 by Eltham pioneer Henry Stooke. He also purchased other land north of Eltham and at Lower Plenty. He later went on to become the chairman of the road board. Stooke never lived on this site and the two houses at Lenister Farm date from well into the twentieth century.

The name Eltham Lower Park is unusual. It was originally Eltham Park and even into the 1960s the bird day reports use this name. In the 1920s the Council purchased a large area adjacent to the Eltham town center for parkland. That became Eltham Central Park and the former Eltham Park was renamed to avoid any confusion.

In recent times the opening of the Yarra footbridge in 2004 links the park with the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park and the Main Yarra Trail. This linkage provides a significantly wider scope of park usage than has historically been the case.

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