



ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER

NO. 174 MAY 2007

NEXT MEETING

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE

LIBRARY PLACE, ELTHAM

(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 9TH MAY

GUEST SPEAKER KRISTIN OTTO

**"YARRA : A DIVERTING HISTORY
OF MELBOURNE'S MURKY RIVER"**



The interesting story of the
Odyssey House footbridge
over the Yarra is told in
Kristin Otto's book

HISTORICAL WALKS PROGRAM

SATURDAY 5 MAY

SATURDAY 7 JULY

**2 PM AT ELTHAM LOCAL
HISTORY CENTRE**

BOOKINGS 9439 9717

MAY MEETING

The Yarra River forms the southern boundary of Eltham and the Shire of Nillumbik. Much of the northern bank of the river in this area is private property resulting from early Crown land sales before it became common practice to leave public reserves along water courses. Where there is public land along the river it is often not readily accessible. So many Eltham residents do not know our part of the river well. They may be more familiar with sections at Templestowe, Warrandyte and Heidelberg where there are popular parks for long stretches of river frontage. This meeting will be a chance to get to know more about our river – the local part and sections upstream to its source in the mountains and downstream through Melbourne to Port Philip Bay.

Kristin Otto, a resident of Yarra Glen, has made a detailed study of the Yarra River and particularly its history. The result is her first book which has the unusual title of "Yarra, A Diverting History of Melbourne's Murky River".

Kristin has a degree in fine arts and has worked as a curator of art and historical collections. She will speak about the research that led to her book and tell some of the many interesting stories that she has written about.

Copies of Kristin's book will be available for sale. The cost is \$32 each.

As usual, we welcome visitors to our meeting so come along and bring a friend.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mick Woiwod is making progress with his physiotherapy at Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. He thanks us for our card signed by members and has hopes of returning to his public activities when he and Margaret take up residence in the Eltham area.

On Anzac Day I went to the Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park which houses the Tower of Remembrance and is the entry via a pathway to the Viewing Platform which is still several months away from 'some sort' of public opening.

Finding only three car spaces at 10.00am, I was delighted to meet with locals and travellers who saw the area as a place to 'stop at' on their day out.

The steel frames which will contain the sixteen interpretive signs are not yet in place. The printing of their items is being 'fine tuned' with the help of experts in this field who have volunteered their services. Two new brass plaques are in place. These are showing the names and enlistment places of the men concerned. The Menin Gate plaque is for those with no known graves, the other commemorates those other Shire of Eltham recruits who are buried on Gallipoli.

This Society has the full roll book of the seventy nine who died. All are buried overseas. Thanks to the Council staff who found suitable basalt rocks for these plaques.

Other actions on the site are to move and erect fences. One to create a planting area above the road near the platform, the other will be of rabbit proof material to create an area for the planting out by the Nillumbik Reconciliation Committee.

Harry Gilham

PAT BADDELEY'S STORY

The first instalment of Pat Baddeley's story of her childhood in Eltham appeared in Newsletter No. 171. It included an introduction to her family, the Nations, and memories of growing up at their house in Dudley Street from the 1930s. We now continue the story from 1942 when Pat started at the Eltham Higher Elementary School.

RECOLLECTIONS OF ELTHAM HIGHER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 1942-1945

We called it the "High School" – and the tone expressed our awe and its mystery. At the "State School" (there was only one then, and it too had three rooms and a hundred kids) we watched for lunchtime signs of the Headmaster's return from the High School to lunch at the residence before he taught us in the afternoons. Very surreptitiously, over our shoulders as we skated on boot-polished leather soles down the steep, onion-grassed slope, or in between playing among the aromatic needles in the dark hollows of the roots of pine trees now gone, we tried to peep through or over the fence, but it was always still and quiet.

Most of us lived in the town, which clung in those careless days around the station, stringing thinly along the Main road. (There were of course the Rich People who lived "on the river", but they inhabited a different world). We walked in small groups along the footpaths, anxious, in spite of the way it ignored our existence, to avoid the dark phalanx of "High Schools" walking from the train.

It was scary starting there. To begin with, you had to cross the footbridge (higher than today's: at ground level) (The low bridge referred to by Pat is now washed away and has been replaced by one higher than the one she remembers.) which wobbled and creaked sickeningly under you. Rumour had it that one of our year CRAWLED over it his first time; later, we would run over it together to test the sway or to slow up enemies coming behind. It really was a new school because kids came down the line from as far as Hurstbridge and Rosanna (sometimes further). One family biked from Strathewen to Hurstbridge station. The Main Road route was used by walking students, unmade Susan Street by those with bikes, and the old bus by rich or sick students and the teachers (who also came by train).

It looked different too, tiny and isolated. A house stood where the tennis courts now are, and Mr Peter Cerneaz, a gentle and friendly Italian, lived there and drove his van from house to house selling the vegetables he grew where the front oval is now. Quince trees grew on the Ely Street and Dalton Street fences, (I don't think either street was formed, let alone made!) – the first, a straggly, sparse lot, the second a thick forest several metres wide, extending the full length of the fence, with hawthorn bushes intermingled on the fence line. This was "out of bounds" (surprise, surprise), and therefore exciting and mysterious. During the War we were split into groups of 5 or 6 for air raid drill and many of us dug little trenches among the trees; quinces were to be paid for – a ha'penny for the Red Cross (not much, I think, was raised, but we still found their tartness interesting for a few bites before they became missiles). This was the period when city people used to come out on trains asking for accommodation if Melbourne was bombed. Another wartime memory is that Form One sewing started with a knitted khaki (Red Cross) Comforts Fund scarf. A left-hander forced to knit the "wrong" way, I hated it, taking the whole year to complete it.

A line of easily-climbed tall pine trees on the western fence provided wonderful views of the school and creek valley. (Our Geography teacher gave us an assignment to draw a map of the creek from footbridge to "concrete" bridge, inserting all the physiographic features we could find. It was the most exciting thing I ever did in school – I wagged sport to do it and got 20/20!) The school ground in those pre-Victa days was an expanse of long grass (or mud!), a map in which you could read movements of children and variations in the weather; an instant retreat giving privacy and an intimate environment of smells and busy insects, and a treacherous cover for pits, lumps and drains waiting to trip you if you were late.

The T-shaped building was a dark concreted lobby with tiny offices off it, and three classrooms – one off the lobby, the others entered from the outside, where roofed verandahs (long since floored and made into corridors) with gravel underfoot sheltered our lockers. ... I suppose my most lasting memory is of the cold – there seemed to be always frost, iced puddles, and freezing classrooms. They all had fireplaces which gave out less and less heat as the quality and availability of firewood declined as the War proceeded, till no fires at all were lit, and we lived in coats and gloves in the semi-dark (no electricity either!). Another lasting memory is of the addition of two classrooms, one on either end of the bar of the T, destined to become a cookery centre (still the kitchen?) and a woodwork/metalwork room which later became a staff room, sick bay and other things. The construction seemed to take forever, and the rooms came into use too late for us, as we were preparing for the Intermediate Certificate. Great care was taken to ensure these rooms matched the existing building in style, and the curved Mediterranean-style tiles were all shifted onto the new rooms, and new matching ones placed over the original part. The tilers sat up there day after day slowly putting and taking tiles, I kid you not. The science room contained the "Library": shelves across the rear wall housed the "Children's Encyclopaedia", a few novels and lots of space; we devoured Arthur Mee's mixture of fact and fancy, moving from How a Steam Engine Works to Myths of Ancient Rome and back to Wonders of the Undersea World over and over again...

Most of the hundred or so students were in form one or two; very many left on their fourteenth birthdays, accepting the necessity to seek a job – not easy to find. It was odd to expect otherwise. If you passed form two and got your Merit certificate; you could sit a test and half a dozen or so would get Junior Scholarships, which paid tuition fees and book allowance for the remaining four years of schooling (yes, tuition fees were paid from form one! I think something like £3 or £5 per year, roughly equivalent to the basic weekly wage). Form three was Proficiency Certificate, and form four intermediate: only twelve sat in my year and we were the biggest group for many years, though history shows that there were larger groups before the Depression cut-backs of the thirties. The exam was an external one, set by the University of Melbourne, and we sat 12 subjects in the old Fire Brigade Hall, where Coles now are in Main Street. It was a hot, dry, dusty walk from school, and we felt very disadvantaged, being unable to wash our hands or even cool our throats with a drink; the hall itself with its unlined iron roof and sloping gravel floor was stifling and not well lit or ventilated.

So I guess the main characteristic of EHES then was its spartan quality, a true reflection of the times and the acute shortages of wartime following those of the Depression. Education was basic too, though not without interest or enjoyment, culminating in tests based on fact-recall and trick questions. The school's location then made it isolated in a quiet world where few families had motor

vehicles and none had petrol (we did see a few cars using gas producers, giving out sparks everywhere!).

Soon after I left the school, Peter Cermeaz moved away and his house became the school caretaker's cottage, the number of students now rising until the High School was established in 1950, and there followed a period of rapid expansion, hasty building and the development of a strong school spirit. Peter's place as door-to-door vegetable man was taken by Arthur Munday, another gentle, kind and wise man. All the food suppliers except the butcher delivered their goods, the grocers calling earlier for the order (hardly anyone had a telephone, either! The public phone had a fixed mouthpiece on a box on the wall: you picked up the earpiece in your left hand, thus lifting its hook, then rapidly wound a handle on the box's right; this connected you to an operator in the exchange and when asked, you gave the number – Heidelberg 123 or Greensborough 456 – and were connected. Replacing the earpiece disconnected you).

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

The Shire of Eltham Historical Society was formed following a public meeting in the Eltham Shire Hall on the very foggy night of 6th June 1967.

The interim committee elected at that meeting met in August of that year to get the Society under way.

During the ensuing forty years the Society has seen a number of significant achievements and, of course, undergone a name change when municipal restructuring saw the demise of the Shire of Eltham.

We will celebrate our anniversary in July with two activities. One Wednesday 11th (which would be our normal meeting night) we have arranged a talk by art historian Andrew McKenzie on "Walter Withers in Eltham". Andrew spoke on a similar subject for our 20th anniversary but since then has uncovered new material on the famous artist, including previously un-published photos. This meeting will be advertised as a public meeting.

On Saturday 14th we will have a buffet lunch at the old Eltham Court House (not a dinner as indicated in our 2007 program). There will be no speaker but of course some speeches. There will be displays featuring Society activities over the years.

OFFICE BEARERS 2007-8

At the Annual General Meeting in March all of the office bearers and committee members from last year were re-elected for the coming year.

The full list of office bearers and committee members is as follows:-

President	Harry Gilham
Senior Vice President	Jim Connor
Junior Vice President	Doug Orford
Treasurer/Membership Secretary	David Johns
Secretary	Russell Yeoman
Committee Members	Diana Bassett-Smith, Sue Law, Jan McCauley, Jo McCormick, Gwen Orford, Jock Read, Mary Regan

The Committee welcomes ideas for Society activities or for the better functioning of the Society. Contact one of the people listed if you have any suggestions.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

At the Annual General Meeting subscriptions for 2007-8 were fixed as follows:-

Newsletter	\$10.00
Adults	\$20.00
Students	\$ 2.00
Family	\$25.00
Business organisations	\$25.00

These are the same as for the previous year.

Subscriptions are due on 1 July but earlier payment is welcomed. David would be happy to receive your money either at the May meeting or in the mail.

OTHER NEWS

Over recent months the Society has received a number of donations of books for our collection. The wide range of subject matter is indicated by the titles listed below:

“From Jolimont to Yering”

- a limited edition publication covering Yarra Valley history by Ray Henderson donated by D and P Bassett-Smith and others.

“A Place of Their Own” by Frances O’Neill

- a history of the Old Colonists Homes in Victoria and donated by the Old Colonists Association.

“The First Forty Years”

- History of the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club and donated by the club.

“A City Lost and Found”

- the story of Whelan the Wrecker by Robyn Annear and donated by David Johns.

We thank all of these donors for these useful additions to our collection. They are available for loan to members.

Records workshops at the Local History Centre will be held on the following dates:-

Mondays 9.30am	21 May	18 June
Tuesdays 7.30pm	5 June	3 July

If these dates are unsuitable we would welcome members making arrangements to come at other times to assist with the important tasks of filing and cataloguing our records. Talk to Harry or Russell if you think you might be able to help.

Harry Gilham
President

Russell Yeoman
Secretary

David Johns
Treasurer /
Membership Secretary
Phone – 9434 3357

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