

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER

NO. 175 JULY 2007

CELEBRATING THE SOCIETY'S FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY

**FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY PUBLIC MEETING
ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE
LIBRARY PLACE, ELTHAM
(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)**

**8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 11TH JULY
GUEST SPEAKER ANDREW MACKENZIE
"WALTER WITHERS IN ELTHAM"**

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**ANNIVERSARY LUNCH  
12.30 PM SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> JULY  
OLD ELTHAM COURTHOUSE  
730 MAIN ROAD**

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**NEXT HISTORICAL WALK
2PM SATURDAY 7TH JULY
STARTS AT LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE
BOOKINGS 9439 9717**

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

Most of this newsletter is devoted to the Society's fortieth anniversary including details of the events we have planned to celebrate it. There is also a "brief" history of the Society since its inception that has turned out to be somewhat longer than anticipated.

As well as the events listed individually, there is also a Walter Withers Walk from Eaglemont to Eltham on 29th July. This is an 18km full day walk inspired by the proposed talk by Andrew Mackenzie detailed below. It will be led by Russell Yeoman and is part of the Living and Learning Centre Nillumbik program. Bookings must be made with the Living and Learning Centre and the cost is \$12 per person or \$20 for two.

ANNIVERSARY LUNCH

We have chosen to celebrate our fortieth anniversary with a Saturday lunch to try and encourage participation by members who have moved away from the district and perhaps some former members from many years ago. This will be a buffet lunch with a minimum of speeches and plenty of opportunity to chat with old friends and acquaintances. Our large collection of photo albums of Society activities will be available for inspection.

The lunch will be held in the old Eltham Courthouse at 730 Main Road Eltham. The Local History Centre next door will be open for inspection of the Society's collection of photos, maps and other records.

The cost of the lunch will be \$10 per person but expect much more than \$10 worth of value. Buffet food will include vegetarian dishes. Wine and other drinks will be provided by our President Harry Gilham.

The date and time of the lunch is 12.30pm Saturday 14 July. Payment can be made on the day or preferably at the July meeting if you are coming.

However, we need to know who is coming for catering purposes. Please ring Gwen Orford on 9439 8642 by Monday 9 July if you are coming.

JULY MEETING

Art historian, Andrew Mackenzie, spoke at the Society's twentieth anniversary dinner on the subject of "Walter Withers in Eltham".

Andrew has studied Withers over many years and has written and edited several books about the artist. He has access to many Withers paintings in galleries and private collections and those owned by the Withers family. Andrew's on-going research has revealed new material about Withers' time in Eltham, including some previously unpublished photographs.

It is, therefore, appropriate that we have invited Andrew back to talk to us at our fortieth anniversary meeting to share this new material with us. Andrew's talk will be illustrated with slides.

Various aspects of the life and work of Walter Withers have appeared regularly in past issues of our Newsletter but for new readers the following very brief biography is provided.

Walter Withers (1854-1914) migrated to Australia from England in 1882 and in time became one of our most famous painters. He was an important member of the renowned Heidelberg School of painters and lived at a number of locations in the Heidelberg area until 1903 when he purchased a house at the corner of Brougham and Bolton Streets, Eltham, where he

lived until his death. Much of his work during these years was done in the local area and his works are displayed in many art galleries, including the National Gallery of Victoria and the Geelong Art Gallery. He is also represented in the Nillumbik Shire Council art collection.

This meeting is being promoted as a public meeting. Although we always welcome visitors, we encourage members to invite their friends along to this important meeting. As usual, there will be supper provided at the end of the meeting.

FORTY YEARS IN HISTORY

The forty years from 1967 to 2007 have seen momentous events and changes in our world. Things that were unknown in 1967 have now become commonplace, for example the internet and mobile phones. The exploration of space is no longer a science fiction phenomenon. In the space of this Newsletter we cannot cover the forty year history of Eltham let alone Australia or the World. So we will simply try to briefly record the history of our Society which began its life as the Shire of Eltham Historical Society.

The driving force behind the establishment of the Society was Shire of Eltham Councillor Charis Pelling. It followed on from her earlier involvement with the Shillinglaw Cottage Preservation Committee which raised funds to relocate and preserve this historic cottage in central Eltham.

The public meeting initiated by Charis took place on a very foggy night in June, so foggy that the speaker from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria did not arrive. There was a large attendance of local people who agreed to establish the Society and appointed an interim committee chaired by Charis Pelling to get it started. At the first meeting of the Society in September 1967 office bearers and committee members were elected, including Charis Pelling as President, Max Watson (at that time Shire Secretary) as Vice President and Jenny Huggins as Secretary.

From that time for the next forty years the general meetings of the Society have been its main activity. Initially meetings were held monthly for most of the year and included Society business as well as a speaker on something similar. From 1977 meetings were held generally at two monthly intervals with committee meetings to deal with Society business, on the intervening months. Meetings were originally held in the Eltham War Memorial Hall and later in the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre forming part of the same war memorial complex. They continue in the senior citizens' hall today because the Local History Centre is not suitable for this type of meeting.

These meetings have covered a surprisingly wide range of subjects. Generally they could be divided into three groups; local history, other historical subjects and other matters of local interest. Speakers have included members of our Society and other historical societies, other local residents, councillors, artists, academics in historical and related fields and many others who perhaps do not fit into a particular category. An innovation has been to introduce panel presentations featuring short talks by representatives of a particular interest such as artists, environmentalists, writers and so on. Many meetings have been illustrated by slides – the conventional type or, more recently, computer based.

Obviously, it is not possible to list all of our speakers and subjects but by way of example the following is a random selection:

David Wilkinson
Clifton Pugh
Alan Marshall

Local resident
Artist
Author

Early history of the Diamond Valley
History of "Dunmoochin"
Proposal for a shire history

Ron Smith	Society member	Gun collecting
Owen Whelan	Local resident	"Whelan the Wrecker"
Bill Wadeson	Amateur film maker	"The Diamond Valley Cup"
Dr R. Bruce Hall IV	Academic	"What Makes Eltham Eltham"
Peter Cuffley	Historian	Cottage Gardens
Cliff Green	Writer	"A Dramatist's Approach to History"
Andrew Lemon	Historian	Researching the wreck of the "Cataraqui"
Andrew Mackenzie	Art historian	Walter Withers
Neil Douglas	Artist	"Should Trees Have Standing"
Carlotta Kellaway	Historian	Eltham Heritage Study
Jock Ryan	Nillumbik Historical Society	"Gold in the Valley"
Harry Gilham	Society member	Kangaroo Ground War Memorial
Mick Woiwod	Local historian	Wurundjeri heritage
Peter Bassett-Smith	Society member	Recording Eltham's history on film

Annual General Meetings have been held in March over many years and, as well as the formal business of the meeting, have always included an interesting agenda item. During the 1990s the theme of these meetings was "My Eltham" with a long term local resident as speaker. Speakers in this series have included literary figure Clem Christesen, landscaper Gordon Ford and Society member Jock Read.

The Society was originally established to cover what was then the Shire of Eltham and its early activities extended over the whole of the Shire from Lower Plenty to Kinglake. It had a close working relationship with the Eltham Shire Council which was partly based on the fact that members included both Councillors and staff of the Shire. Subsequent events which have included the establishment of other local societies within the area and municipal restructuring have meant that the Society's activities are more confined to the Eltham district. However, the Society's collection of local records extends to cover the whole of the former Shire.

Apart from meetings, the first activity of the Society was the staging of an exhibition in 1968 of local information from its then small collection and including many borrowed items. Since that time there have been many further exhibitions. Some have been on particular themes such as those nominated by the National Trust for its annual Heritage Week. Others have been to celebrate centenaries or other anniversaries of local schools or other local organizations. Many displays have been organized on behalf of the Council for various civic events such as the opening of new buildings, the Eltham Community Festival, civic dinners and the like. Perhaps the highlight of the long list of exhibitions was the Australian Bicentennial display at the Eltham Shire Offices and titled "The Eltham Tradition".

Over the years there has been significant interaction between the Society and the Council, initially Eltham and later Nillumbik. The most significant involvement in the early years was the publication in 1971 of the Shire's centenary history "Pioneers and Painters" edited by Alan Marshall. From as early as 1969 the Society was represented on a committee which ultimately led to the publication. Society members carried out much of the research and assisted in the search for historical photos and art works. In addition to the book, this project added significantly to the Society's collection of local records and resulted in the Council obtaining an excellent collection of historical photos covering all areas of the Shire. That collection is now housed in the Eltham Library.

Our on-going involvement with the Council provides benefits to both sides. We have been and continue to be regularly consulted by the Council regarding local historical matters. We have been represented on a number of committees, working parties and the like providing input to Council on heritage matters and some other specific projects. Notably we provided major input to the Shire of Eltham Heritage Study and later the expanded Nillumbik Heritage Study.

More recently, Harry Gilham has provided a significant contribution as convenor of a committee overseeing the refurbishment of the War Memorial Tower at Kangaroo Ground, together with Dennis Ward and Mick Woiwod.

As to the benefits to our Society we have received a number of grants from both Eltham and later Nillumbik Councils. Some have been to support the administrative costs of the Society and some have been for particular projects. With the aid of grants over several years we have purchased computer equipment and cataloguing software that will in time see a comprehensive index to the Society's collection.

In 1994 the Society's involvement with the Council was somewhat interrupted by the State Government's program of municipal restructuring. The Shire of Eltham ceased to exist and in its place we had the Shire of Nillumbik. This included additional areas such as Christmas Hills, Diamond Creek, Plenty and Yarrambat. Lower Plenty, Montmorency and Briar Hill, areas in which we had a significant interest, went to the City of Banyule. The Society changed its name to the Eltham District Historical Society with its main area of interest extending from Lower Plenty to Kangaroo Ground. This introduced a further Council contact, that is with Banyule City Council.

The Society became involved with negotiations regarding memorabilia held by the various Councils. Firstly, there was a joint committee involving Banyule. Once an appropriate apportionment was resolved there were meetings with Nillumbik to catalogue memorabilia of the former Eltham Council. Ultimately, that memorabilia has been transferred to the Society to manage on behalf of the Council.

In 1996-7 the Society was involved in discussions with the Council regarding the use of the former Eltham police residence at 728 Main Road. This ultimately led to establishment of the Eltham Local History centre as a home for the Society and particularly a place to store its growing collection of records. Previously these had been stored in various locations, mainly members' homes. A conscious decision has been made not to operate it as a museum and so the material stored is largely paper based records, photographs and the like. Having this facility available has led to a significant increase in the quantity of this type of material accruing to the Society. In particular, the work of Harry Gilham has led to significant additions to the collection, notably in relation to schools, railways, war memorials. Harry has also been largely responsible for the displays of photos, maps and information panels that occupy most of the wall space. Peter and Diana Bassett-Smith have also made significant contributions to the Society's collection. In recent times we have also been granted use of the former Court House adjoining our Local History Centre. We have participated in management of this area, now termed the Eltham Justice Precinct with both Council and State Government departments.

In 1990 the Society became aware that the former residence at Kangaroo Ground School may become available for use. Following negotiations with the school and consultation with the local community it was agreed that a museum should be established and that it should be based on a theme related to pioneer Kangaroo Ground teacher Andrew Ross. The museum opened in March 1993. Initially it was managed by a sub-committee of the Society but in time a separate Board of Management was established. Today the Andrew Ross Museum operates most successfully in its own right under the control of local Kangaroo Ground people. For many years prior to the establishment of the museum Bruce and Joy Ness stored artefacts donated to the Society in their barn at Kangaroo Ground. They were the originators of the museum plan. The artefacts from that collection started off the museum's display leaving the Society with its paper based records collection referred to above. Many local people have been involved in setting up the museum but the outstanding work of Mick and Margaret Woiwod is most noteworthy. The contribution of Bruce Nixon as a generous benefactor is also recorded.

There are now some nine historical societies and other heritage organizations covering the various areas of the Shire of Nillumbik. In 2003 the Council took the initiative of bringing these groups together for regular meetings. The result was a major exhibition at Panton Hill in March 2004 titled "Dirt Farming Expo". A further result has been the continued meeting of the groups to co-ordinate activities and share their experiences. Each society continues with its own activities but there is much better appreciation of heritage on a Shire wide basis. The role of the Council and Nillumbik Tourism Association in assisting with this process is acknowledged.

In addition to this contact within Nillumbik the Society has had various contacts with other historical societies over many years. Eltham is affiliated with the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and, under its auspices, with the Association of Eastern Historical Societies. In 1983 we hosted a visit of the RHSV to Eltham and we have hosted two meetings of the eastern region societies. We have received visits from a number of other societies, including Sandringham, Camberwell and Midlands (Maryborough). We have also visited a number of other areas as guests of their societies including Sorrento, Marysville and Brighton. The Society exchanges newsletters with a number of other societies, especially in Nillumbik and the eastern region.

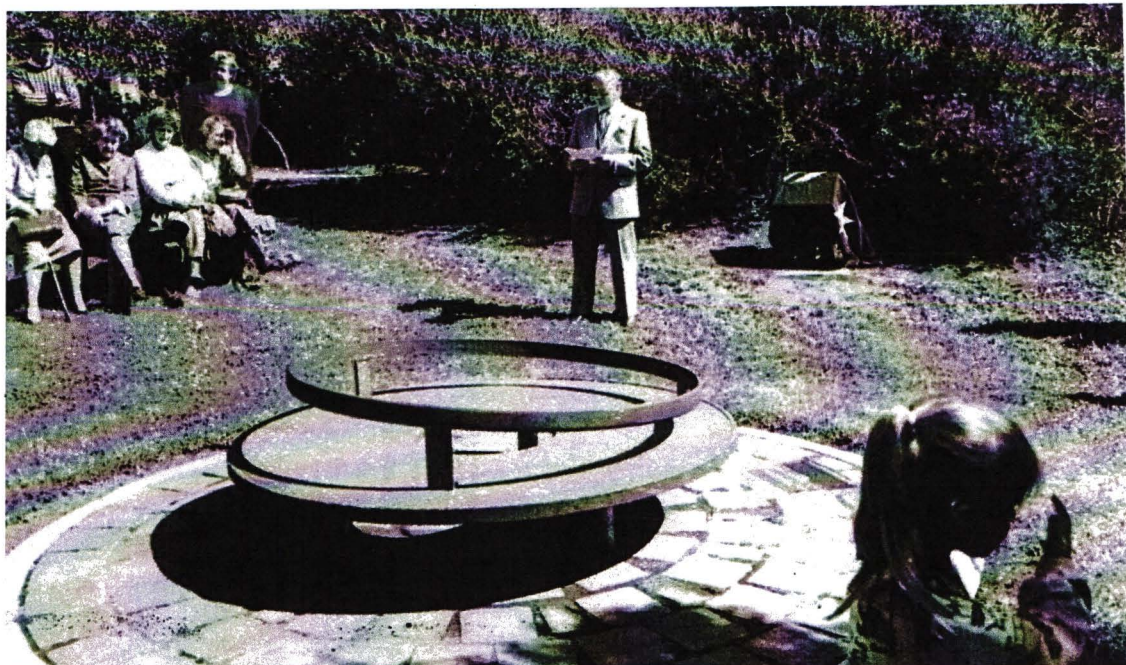
Apart from these hosted visits, there have been many Society excursions, both locally and to other parts of Victoria. Over many years two excursions were conducted each year but over recent years participation in excursions has fallen away and they are not held so regularly. Some interesting bus trips have included Walhalla, following the Yarra River to the Upper Yarra Dam and two excursions following the trail of explorers Hume and Hovell across Victoria.

Our Society has established strong contacts with the Eltham Society in England. Eltham is a historic town that has now become an outer suburb of London. A number of their members have visited our Eltham, notably Margaret Taylor and Clifford Crate, both former "Chairman" of the Society. Several of our members have payed return visits to our English counterpart. As an Australian Bicentenary present in 1988, our Society received a magnificently produced slide based audio-visual tour of the English Eltham. We have also established contacts with the historical society in Eltham, New Zealand.

The Society has been involved with a number of one off historical projects that have lasting outcomes. Perhaps the most significant is the monument and time capsule installed at the Eltham Community Centre site at the corner of Pitt Street and Main Road to commemorate Victoria's 150th anniversary. The monument based on a blacksmith's tying plate was designed by artist Joh Ebeli. Beneath it is a time capsule containing items from 1985 and donated by Graham Beyer. It is to be opened in 2035. Another monument type project was made possible by a Government grant for Australia's Bi-centennial. This consists of a plaque commemorating artist Walter Withers placed on a large boulder in the Walter Withers Reserve at the corner of Arthur and Bible Streets.

With support from the Council Arts Officer members took part in a banner project involving many local groups. Our banner featuring a large map of the Shire of Eltham now hangs in the Local History Centre. Another art project resulted in a bronze sculpture of an Eltham "pothole" which has since gone missing.

There have been other projects in the form of research and production of books and other publications. Most have been the projects of individual members and in some cases we have assisted authors outside the Society with research. The publication by the Society of the "Reminiscences of Andrew Ross" from the Evelyn Observer was initiated by Mick Woiod. Mick has gone on to write a number of books himself, firstly a history of Christmas Hills, several dealing with aspects of Kangaroo Ground history and even an historical novel, "The Last Cry" dealing with interaction between early European settlers and the Wurundjeri inhabitants of the area. Harry Gilham's chronology of local events has proved to be a valuable



Unveiling the 150th monument 1985.
 Above: Beryl Read, Kath Stephenson and Marjorie Motschall.
 Top:..Joh Ebeli addresses the group.

resource for historians and history students. Russell Yeoman has produced a number of short histories on various themes for Council reports and the like. He has also provided significant input to Marguerite Marshall's publication "Eltham Shire Historic Buildings People and Places" and its later version "Nillumbik Now and Then".

Over the years the Society has organized many heritage walks around Eltham for the public. Some have been as part of the Eltham Living and Learning Centre programs. Others have been organized directly by the Society. Guides for these walks have included Russell Yeoman, Harry Gilham, Jock Read and Doug Orford. These members have also been involved in local history courses or talks at the Living and Learning Centre and schools.

In past years members have obtained great enjoyment from our participation in the Eltham Community Festival. For many years the Society entered a float in the festival parade and on most occasions won a prize in one of the categories. Members would dress up in accordance with the theme of the float. Some that come to mind are Gold Mining, Eltham Bush Hospital

and Eltham Artists where we were assisted by the Diamond Valley Arts Society. For many years members of the Victorian Folk Music Club accompanied our float. The float took several forms; a large borrowed trailer sometimes towed by Peter Basset-Smith's tractor, Bruce Ness's truck, or a truck borrowed from the Research fruit shop. On most occasions the float was decorated by Joh Ebeli with assistance from a few others. After completion of the banner project the Society banner was carried in front of the float. With changes in the format of the festival this aspect of Society activities is now history.

A long established and on-going feature of Society activities is the Newsletter issued every two months prior to meetings. Initially members were advised of meetings or other activities by a simple notice and not all of these have survived. In May 1978 the first proper Newsletter was issued and they have continued regularly from then up to this issue, No. 175. They started off advising of Society activities but now, according to available space, brief historical articles are included. With modern copying techniques the quality of printing has improved considerably and we are able to reproduce reasonable quality illustrations. For many years now the Newsletter has featured the Society's logo, designed by John Ebeli and showing the railway trestle bridge and Shillinglaw Cottage. Eltham Shire Council's support for the Society included copying for the Newsletter. In recent years it has been copied by courtesy of Steve Herbert MP, State Member for Eltham.

This history cannot hope to list all members of the committee over the years but their efforts in managing the business of the Society is greatly appreciated. However, the principal office-bearers have generally remained for long periods and made major contributions to the Society and it is appropriate to list them here. Following Charis Pelling as president have been Peter Bassett-Smith, Kath Stephenson, Sue Law and Harry Gilham. Russell Yeoman has been Secretary for 38 of the Society's 40 years. Treasurers have included Graham Beyer, Opal Smith, Gwen Orford and David Johns. A number of these people have been awarded life membership of the Society in recognition of their contribution. They are Peter-Bassett Smith, Sue Law, Russell Yeoman, Harry Gilham and Opal Smith. Gwen and Doug Orford and Jock Read have also been awarded life memberships for their excellent contributions over many years. The committee also recommended a life membership for Blanche Shallard but sadly she passed away before it could be presented.

History never finishes. The Society continues on and this article represents only the first 40 years. Check out the Newsletter for the history of the next 20 or 40 years.

OTHER NEWS

We have a busy round of activities in July but we will also be keeping up our regular items. There will be the usual heritage walk on Saturday 7 July. Members are welcome as well as the general public. The walk starts at 2pm at the Local History Centre. We will also be holding records workshops on the usual monthly basis. The dates for these are:

Tuesdays	7.30pm	3 July	7 August
Mondays	9.30am	16 July	20 August

Also as usual we encourage members to come along and assist with this on-going task.

Nillumbik Shire Council and the Nillumbik Tourism Association have jointly produced a brochure giving details of all heritage groups in Nillumbik. A copy is included with this Newsletter.

Harry Gilham
President

Russell Yeoman
Secretary

David Johns
Treasurer /
Membership Secretary

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