



ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095

NEWSLETTER

NO. 176 SEPTEMBER 2007

NEXT MEETING

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

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 12TH SEPTEMBER

PANEL PRESENTATION

ELTHAM PEOPLE - STORIES FROM OUR FILES

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**NEXT FREE PUBLIC HISTORICAL WALK**

**SATURDAY 3 NOVEMBER**

**2 PM AT ELTHAM LOCAL HISTORY CENTRE**

**BOOKINGS 9439 9717**



The Eltham Primitive Methodist Church (later converted to a house) is shown beyond the old Bridge Street bridge in this early 20<sup>th</sup> century view. See feature article by Ken Eckersall.

## **SEPTEMBER MEETING**

Our Society's extensive collection of records contains a wealth of information on local people, places and events. Much of this material is locked away in filing cabinets or in shelves of folders, rarely opened except where someone is working on a particular project. Many of the photographs from our collection have been shown at past meetings but the printed documents have not been aired at meetings to any great extent.

For this meeting we have selected the topic of Eltham people and a panel of Committee members will base a series of short talks on various stories from our files.

Harry Gilham will talk about the Wingrove family. Long serving Roads Board and Shire Secretary, Charles Wingrove built the historically significant Wingrove Cottage in c.1859 and it was occupied by his family until the 1960s.

Sue Law will base her talk on the newspaper collection entitled *Head Shots, Top Tales* containing articles from the *Diamond Valley News* on local personalities.

Russell Yeoman has collected information on Sir William Irvine who held many important Victorian parliamentary and judicial positions. The Irvine family home "Killeavey" was situated by the Yarra River at the end of Reynolds Road. Later it was owned by Sir William's daughter Beatrice Morrison. There may be time to include an introduction to Joseph Panton a prominent figure in Victorian history and an earlier owner of the Irvine land.

Doug Orford will give a short talk about the Erswell family based on an article from our family history project. The Erswells once owned the land now occupied by the Eltham Retirement Village (former Judge Book Village).

This grass roots history meeting will feature talks based on information in our files or short readings from selected documents. It should provide an interesting addition to our collective store of local history knowledge.

## **FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS**

Two very successful events held in July to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society.

The July meeting was widely publicized as a public meeting for the anniversary. As a result there was an excellent attendance to hear Andrew Mackenzie speak on Walter Withers in Eltham.

Withers is an important figure in Eltham's history and a most appropriate subject for this significant meeting. Andrew showed slides from his extensive collection of images of Withers' paintings and views of Eltham in early 1900s when the artist lived here. Many of these slides were new additions to Andrew's collection and generated great interest amongst those present. Andrew was ably assisted in his presentation by John Withers, grandson of Walter.

The Eltham Courthouse was the perfect setting for the Society's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration lunch on Saturday, 14th July. Many long-time members attended, as well as several newly joined members. And many members who have moved away from the Eltham area came to renew Society friendships.

Nillumbik Shire Mayor, Warwick Leason, admired and praised the Society's forty years of collection and preservation of Eltham's history for the benefit of the whole community. He thanked President Harry Gilham and Secretary Russell Yeoman in particular for their ongoing dedication to maintaining these valuable historical records and preservation of the collection at the Local History Centre in the Police Residence at 728 Main Road, Eltham.

A relaxed lunch allowed time to catch up before the presentation of the cake. Then good weather enabled guests to move from the main Courthouse into the annex for afternoon tea and further catching up with old friends.

Attendees were given a plant indigenous to the local area as a souvenir of the event.

Many guests took advantage of the opportunity to move on into the Police Residence to view the Society's large collection of photos, maps and records of the history of Eltham and surrounding district.

### **'A CHURCH WAS ERECTED AT NILLUMBIK': A SKETCH PAPER**

*by Kenneth Eric Eckersall*

This sketch paper provides a primary source of history of the Shire of Nillumbik, particularly of Nillumbik and Eltham Primitive Methodist Churches, drawn from *The History of Primitive Methodism in Victoria and Tasmania*, penned by the Rev. Michael Clarke in about 1887.

Like prophets of old, Moses, Jeremiah, Paul the Apostle, the Rev. Michael Clarke was a somewhat reluctant mouthpiece of God, he admitted, at least when it came to chronicling the early days of Primitive Methodism.

Rev. Michael Clarke, third Primitive Methodist minister in the Colony of Victoria, arrived from England, 6 December 1853, following after Rev. John Ride, who arrived 17 January 1850, and Rev. George Watts, 27 November 1851. Michael Clarke penned this history some 34 years after his arrival in the colony.

The Primitive Methodist Church, one of the churches which grew out of the revival of the eighteenth century in England, under the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., reached the Australian colonies. In Victoria, the Primitive Methodists grew to be the second largest of these bodies, after the Wesleyans. *Eltham Inhabitants: for most the serious part: church in community 1850-2000* (Eckersall, 2000) details the Eltham Wesleyan Methodist Church (after 1902, Methodist and after 1977, Uniting) and considers the historical background and relationships between the Wesleyans and Primitives among others; and it briefly refers to the 'West Eltham' Primitive Methodist Chapel. This paper fills out some details from the Primitive Methodist side; the Wesleyans and Primitives coming into union in Australia in 1902.

In the interview by Colin Jones, 6 December 1975, Mrs Edna Hill recalled the Eltham Primitive Methodist chapel site, the south-west corner of Bridge and Susan Streets, diagonally opposite the Hill home, farm and dairy; the entrance facing Susan Street. Story has it that this chapel replaced an earlier bark hut. A house later occupied the site, the chapel converted, until about 1960.

Here follow selected citations from Michael Clarke's *History of Primitive Methodism in Victoria and Tasmania*. They cover local and wider contemporary events, especially the Gold Rushes across Victoria (while not as notable as Mt Alexander, Ballarat or Bendigo, the Caledonian diggings, in the present Shire of Nillumbik, attracted thousands). Of

particular interest is the reference to Nillumbik Primitive Methodist Church, 'head of the station' in 1871; 'Nillumbik and Diamond Creek...only about a mile apart'.

*It is well known that the great influx of population in Victoria occurred immediately preceding, concurrent with, and following the opening out of the goldfields. Among the thousands that arrived from 1848 to 1851, were sundry Primitive Methodists. They were men of the right stamp – mechanics, miners, farmers, labourers, God-fearing men – men whose piety had stood the test of a long voyage, which has proved fatal to the religion of many; but these devoted men maintained a consistent profession of Christ, and had no sooner landed than they set about arranging for holding religious services. And herein we perceive THE SELF-PROPAGATING CHARACTER OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.*

(p. 3.)

[21 April 1854] Mr. Clarke started on his journey to the diggings, in a vehicle called the "Argus conveyance" drawn by three horses...Let it be understood that there was no properly formed road beyond Essendon, the country was open, fences and bridges there were none, but innumerable bush tracks, alongside of which lay dead horses and bullocks, and broken wagons and drays. There were but two passengers, and the driver was kept constantly alert.

#### A DRIVE TO THE DIGGINGS

Look at us then: after passing along about seven miles of tolerable road: -  
We had the country before us  
To choose, which we judged best,  
With Providence for our guide.  
Now we dash across a dangerous creek  
The we toil to reach the mountain top;  
Anon we scour the Keilor plains,  
Touch at the gap, press through the bush,  
By sun-down reach a tavern, - the half way house, -  
And tarry for the night, amidst strange company,  
Unsuitable for ministers, but no alternative.  
Grub, grog, and puns are pushed about,  
With great garrulity, till a late hour,  
When Morpheus[\*] mastering boisterous Bacchus,  
Laid all on stretcher beds, in wakeful slumbers.  
By early dawn we took our seats,  
And on we battled through Black Forest,  
Where deeds of darkness done,  
Within the last few years –  
And seldom perpetrated now –  
Are told us in all their terrible atrocity.  
Making Mount Macedon by high meridian,  
Our zig-zag course we still pursue,  
O'er many a rut, and swamp, and hill,  
Until, at last, the longed-for creek –  
Cleared, excavated, and auriferous –  
Bursts on our view:  
Bestud with tents, and stores, and tools of toil

*Where thousands dwell, and earn their bread  
And something more,  
By digging, drawing, and depositing,  
In chest or treasury, the rich contents,  
Rocked in their cradles, prepared for them,  
By God the Lord, when at His word  
The mountains rose, the creeks were clove,  
And the terraqueous globe was set agoing.*

*[Morpheus: god of sleep.]*

*(p.9.)*

*A church was erected at Heidelberg, which cost £685 8s, towards which was raised £294, and £391 was borrowed at 8 per cent; but this was cancelled the following year, on condition that the trustees accepted the loan of an additional £100, and erected a house for a resident minister, which of course was accepted. The church was opened 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1854. Campbellfield and a few other places were placed on the Melbourne plan. The price of provisions rose very high: flour, £25 per ton; firewood, £3; butter, 5s lb; milk, 2s 6d quart; cabbage, 2s 6d each; potatoes, 8d lb; and other things in proportion. The preacher's salary was raised 150 per cent above the English salary; the station responded nobly, and resolved not to ask for further assistance from the General Missionary Committee.*

*(p. 11.)*

*One of our most earnest pioneer local preachers, Mr. E. Crozier, who entertained the writer on his first visit to the Mount Alexander goldfield, had arrived at Eaglehawk; and the first day he went to work in the mine, 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1866, was killed by the falling of a large stone. He did not survive many hours. His last words were "Thank God! I believe in Jesus! Lord take care of my wife and children!" A prayer which has been answered.*

*(p. 21.)*

#### *Amherst*

*This place and Avoca formed a branch of the Castlemaine circuit for some years previous to it being placed under the care of the Australian General Missionary Committee [A.G.M.C.]...[ref.] meeting of March, 1859.*

*Immediately after this, a great 'rush' took place at Back Creek, now Talbot, about three miles from Amherst; and within a few weeks it was estimated there were no fewer than 60,000 people on the ground, where previously there were not three-score. Several of our members and local preachers were among the first arrivals. They at once commenced preaching in the open-air on Sundays, and arranged for the erection of a place of worship about the centre of the diggings. When finished Messrs M. Clarke and George Kitching were invited to conduct the opening services. They arrived by coach on the Saturday evening, and were heartily received by the friends, who lodged them in their tents during their stay. The scene in the evening was most picturesque and exciting. There was an extensive area, covered with tents, decorated with flags of divers devices, and rousing log fires blazing in front of them. Before retiring for the night, as if by concert, the miners stood in front of their tents and fired revolvers that all and sundry might know they were prepared to defend themselves against intruders. The preachers after their jolting journey, slept soundly and awoke next morning fresh and eager for their work. The congregations were large, the services animating, and the monetary proceeds satisfactory. This building is still to the fore, but has been removed into the township, where it now stands at the rear of the beautiful church, erected at a later date, and is used as a Sabbath school room...*

*In the midst of these encouraging circumstances, Mr. Brazier, who had been months only on the station, tendered his resignation...*

*Mr Brazier's resignation placed the A.G.M. in considerable difficulty. A preacher was wanted for this important goldfield, and they had no one, nor knew any one, whom they could send. While pondering what could be done, an unexpected visitor came upon the scene, Mr. William Eckersall, formerly a popular minister of our denomination in England, arrived at Castlemaine. He was well known by some of the officials, and it occurred to them that he was the very man for Amherst, if he would consent to go. On being questioned by the committee he expressed his willingness to take up the work, and was therefore engaged as a H.L.P. after furnishing credentials from the Melbourne Circuit, and signing the usual pledge. Application, at the same time was made to the General Missionary Committee and Conference to confirm this appointment. Mr. Eckersall removed with his family to Amherst, and entered upon the mission with encouraging prospects of success. Very soon he had two young men besides himself employed; this increased the cost of working the mission, but they opened five fresh places, purchased one room for church purposes, and made arrangements for the erection of others. At the September quarterly meeting, 1860, they reported 67 members. Immediately afterwards, 18<sup>th</sup> September, an answer was received from London, declining to confirm the appointment of Mr. Eckersall, and the engagement with him was unexpectedly and reluctantly terminated. The young men were also notified that their services would no longer be required after the 24<sup>th</sup>.*

*The A.G.M. Committee then requested Melbourne Circuit to take charge of Heidelberg mission, and allow Mr. Bracewell to remove to Amherst. This was conceded, and he entered upon the mission, October, 1860, and remained until April, 1862, when the station reported 55 members.*

(pp. 28-29.)

### *Heidelberg*

*This was one of the first places wrought in connection with Melbourne Station, and the first place at which Mr. Clarke preached on his arrival from England. The occasion was a Camp Meeting held 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1853, at which Messrs. Ride, Lord, and others, officiated. The day was remarkably fine, the attendance good, and a blessed influence accompanied the preaching of the gospel. The erection of the church and minister's residence already have been described. Heidelberg was formed into a mission March, 1860, with 17 members, and Mr. Bracewell removed there in April, and after labouring six months was transferred to Amherst. Melbourne resumed the care of the station at the request of the A.G.M. Committee, until January, 1861, when Mr. Heathershaw was appointed. He found 18 members, and left 47 in September, 1865, having been over four years on the station. During his ministry considerable progress was made, not only in accessions to the church, but in the reduction of debt, and opening new places. A bazaar was held at Heidelberg, which reduced the debt on the premises by £150, and left £25 in hand for improvements. He also erected at Diamond Creek a small place of worship, and residence for the day school teacher, and purchased a building at Warrantyte, in which to hold religious services. These two places and Templestowe were opened by him; J. Ashmead, G. Gilbert, E. Fowler, and I. Hickson rendered valuable aid. On his removal, Mr. J.H. Brown was appointed, but the work remained stationary, as in December, 1867, there will still 47 members.*

(pp. 30-31.)

## *Heidelberg*

*In our previous notice of this mission it should have been stated that a brick church was built at Eltham, during Mr. Bracewell's superintendency, but we have no means of ascertaining at what cost, although we understand it is free of debt, and still occupies the second place on the station.*

*The following brethren laboured at this mission from 1868 to 1878: - H. Robinson, W.H. Walton, A.T. Glasson, W. Adams, W. Gould, and a H.L.P. A church was erected at Nillumbik, now the head of the station, in 1871, at a cost of £165, and another at Arthur's Creek, in 1873, which cost £70. A successful Sabbath school has been conducted at the former place ever since, in which Mr. Wilson and Mr. and Mrs. Farmer have laboured diligently. The population is small and widely scattered, and although much good work has been done, yet there was a reported increase of one member only for the ten years.*

*(p. 42.)*

*The Twenty-second Annual District Meeting was held in Lygon street Church, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1879...Nillumbik was substituted as the name for Heidelberg Mission, as services had been discontinued at the latter place, and the minister had removed to the former.*

*(p. 49.)*

## *Missions*

### *Nillumbik*

*In 1878 this mission returned 47 members, and in December, 1886, reported 73. Seven ministers have been on the station in that time, and there has been a small annual increase. It must be remembered, however, that the mission has suffered much from removals and depression in mining affairs. The local brethren have laboured unweariedly; and for their unremitting attention to the interests of the station, these names deserve a permanent record. George Gilbert missioned Arthur's Creek, and preached the first two sermons there; E.T. Peers for many years has done good service; and so have W. Farmer, P. Shillinglaw, and W. Wilson. Nillumbik and Diamond Creek are only about a mile apart; the minister lives at the latter place, and the house in 1881 was improved at a cost of £120, towards which was raised £46 10s 11d, being the balance from sale of Heidelberg church property. Eltham church, which cost £170, has still a debt upon it of £40. The station consists of four places, besides Linton, which is occasionally visited by the minister, the Rev. R. Jackson, who is a most earnest indefatigable worker. The record stands— 73 members, 5 local preachers, 3 class leaders, 4 chapels, 3 Sabbath schools, 15 teachers, and 112 scholars.*

*(p. 61.)*

## **Footnote: drawing connections**

Present members of Eltham Uniting Church (formerly Methodist), which meets in the heritage 1881 building, corner of John Street and Main Road, Eltham, trace their lineage looking for possible connections.

Ken Eckersall traces back to his great grandfather, William Eckersall, and great grandmother, Elizabeth, who journeyed to Amherst with their then three children, Sarah Ann, Mary Jane, Margaret Helen: William James, John Eli (Ken's grandfather) and Elizabeth came later. The Rev. Samuel Bracewell (there were some marvellous names, also including one of the founders of Primitive Methodism in Victoria, Mr Lord, and a later Methodist minister, the Rev. G.R. Godbehear), Bracewell's story connects with that of William Eckersall whom he succeeded at Amherst in 1860, following his ministry at Heidelberg-Eltham.

Rosemary Lade was unsuccessful in finding any connection between E. Crozier, killed in a mining accident at Eaglehawk in 1866, and her great great grandfather, William Crozier, of County Armagh, Ireland. It was in William and Mary Crozier's home in Mt Pleasant Road, Eltham, that the first Wesleyan services were held in 1850. Rosemary checked genealogy lists, mining accidents records and Durham Mining Museum website which established one, Elias Crozier as being within the age range. She enjoyed the hunt!

### ***And a curiosity***

This history book has every second pair of pages left blank: apparently the printer had not acquired a compositor's knowledge of imposition.

### **References**

*The History of Primitive Methodism in Victoria and Tasmania* by the Rev. M. Clarke. Printed by Robert Allen Machine Printer, "Leader", Talbot [c1887]. Located at the State Library of Victoria (stacks).

Eckersall, K.E., *Eltham Inhabitants: for most the serious part: church in community 1850-2000*. Melbourne: Uniting, 2000. Located at Eltham Local History Centre, 728 Main Road Eltham 2095.

### **OTHER NEWS**

The usual monthly records workshops for September and October are as follows:

|          |        |              |           |
|----------|--------|--------------|-----------|
| Tuesdays | 7.30pm | 4 September  | 2 October |
| Mondays  | 9.30am | 17 September | 15        |
| October  |        |              |           |

We encourage members to come along and assist with this on-going task.

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The Andrew Ross Museum at Kangaroo Ground is presenting a special exhibition under the title of "this old house" on Sunday 21 October commencing at 2pm. It features "Birch Cottage" an 1673 miner's cottage at Christmas Hills. The Museum is seeking support for preservation of the cottage.

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Nillumbik Shire Council is currently examining options for a new or refurbished civic centre. One option is to construct a new building on the former Eltham Shire Office site. As a society we do not have a view on which option should be adopted. However we have made a submission to the Council on the basis that if the Eltham site is chosen then the Shillinglaw trees must be preserved and the integrity of the adjoining War Memorial site must be maintained.

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