



# **ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Incorporated**

**No. A0016285F**

**728 MAIN ROAD (PO BOX 137) ELTHAM 3095**

## **NEWSLETTER**

**NO. 179 MARCH 2008**

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 12<sup>TH</sup> MARCH**

**ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE**

**LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM**

**(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)**

**SPEAKER HAROLD BIRD AOM**

**AN ILLUSTRATED TALK ON**

**"AOS6 AND THE BIRD FAMILY ORCHARD"**



Detail from "Mr Bird Spraying His Orchard 1958"  
Oil painting by David Armfield



## **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 Annual General Meeting 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 Annual General Meeting take precedence over those received at the meeting.

## **AOS6 AND THE BIRD FAMILY ORCHARD**

Early Eltham pioneer George Bird established his home and orchard at the eastern end of Pitt Street and until recently the Bird family has been working and living on land in this area. Harold and Yvonne Bird have now moved from the family home and now is an appropriate time to hear Harold's reminiscences.

With assistance from the Eltham District Steam Preservation Society Harold has had a computerised slide presentation prepared showing orchard activities. It particularly features the Australian Orchard Special Tractor or AOS6. This rare tractor worked the property for many years and now resides in the museum at Bundoora Park. To accompany the brief slide show Harold will talk about the family orchard including its history and how AOS6 was an integral part of the operation.

Harold will also speak about the painting "Mr Bird Spraying His Orchard 1958" by David Armfield, presented to the Society by the artist. Interestingly, Harold had not seen this painting until recently.

If you are not interested in coming for the formal part of the meeting you should come to hear this interesting talk and see the visual presentation. We hope also to have a representative of the Steam Preservation Society.

## **OPENING OF THE VIEWING PLATFORM AT KANGAROO GROUND**

Nillumbik Council has advised that the viewing platform at Kangaroo Ground 27km NE of Melbourne is to be opened to the public on Wednesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2008 (Melway 271, G10)

The function of the platform is to provide shelter adjacent to the War Memorial Tower whilst allowing all people to enjoy the stunning panoramic views. From the platform you can see the Dandenongs, the city of Melbourne, the Yarra Ranges, Mount Macedon, the Kinglake Ranges and the Mt Baw-Baw Ranges where the Yarra River starts. This landscape covers all the ancestral lands of the Wurundjeri and some of the wider Kulin nation land.

The platform has been given the name Moor-rul, a name which described the fertile soils of the Kangaroo Ground area in contrast to the poorer (Silurian) country of its surrounds, which the Wurundjeri knew as 'Nillumbik' or less rich country.

The full 360 degree view can be seen from the adjacent Tower of Remembrance which has 53 stairs. The viewing platform however can be accessed by wheelchair. Inside the viewing platform there are eight double sided interpretive panels giving the history and information regarding this special area. The viewing platform's interpretive panels set out the Aboriginal and European



history of the area and also the geology and the local flora and fauna, so that the casual visitor comes away understanding more about this significant part of Victoria.

The concept of the viewing platform is part of the refurbishment project for the Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park which has taken place since 1997 with the active approval and financial assistance of the Nillumbik Shire Council. This project has been guided by an Advisory Committee with volunteer community representatives from the local Historical Societies, the Country Fire Authority, the Returned Services League and the Wurundjeri people. Other allied groups such as the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group have been called upon for their expertise.

The initial idea for the viewing platform came from Dean Stewart when he was the caretaker while living at the park. He discussed this idea with local author Mick Woiwod and Harry Gilham of Eltham District Historical Society when they were planning the refurbishment of the War Memorial Park in 1996.

When the committee was formalised by the Nillumbik Council in 1997, Nicholas Pelling, representing the CFA and RSL, joined the group. Dennis Ward, local architect, then volunteered to develop the concept plan for the refurbishment of the park and later drew up the plans for the viewing platform.

The Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park and its Tower of Remembrance is located on one of the highest locations in the Yarra Valley. The Tower of Remembrance is a unique war memorial constructed from local stone standing 14 metres high. It was built in the style of a Scottish watchtower reflecting the strong Scottish influence of the first European settlers of the district from the 1840s onward.

The park was opened in 1921 and the Tower of Remembrance was dedicated in 1926 recognising the local people who served in the First World War. Those who served in the Second World War were recognised by plaques dedicated in 1951 and more recently those who served in Korea, Borneo, Malaya and Vietnam by plaques unveiled in 2001.

Harry Gilham, Advisory Committee Convenor

### **CENTENARY OF WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN VICTORIA**

On 18<sup>th</sup> November 1908 the Victorian Parliament passed a bill granting women the right to vote in Victorian elections for the first time. This achievement followed intense campaigning on behalf of women, including earlier in that year a 260 metre long petition containing 30,000 signatures.

To celebrate the centenary of this event there are a number of events in Melbourne and other places throughout the year. Some have already happened but watch the press for dates of coming events, including free lectures arranged by The Victorian Women's Trust.

At our November meeting we will have a panel presentation on this subject.

### **ELTHAM'S HOMELESS**

by Sue Law

The plight of Eltham's homeless population has been brought to the attention of the Society's Committee by a recent break-in at the Local History Centre at 728 Main Road Eltham.

On Monday 18<sup>th</sup> February the general disorder evident in all the rooms meant entry had been gained to the Police House. Papers were strewn across the floors of some of the rooms, pictures had been dislodged from the walls, and several items on tables and shelves had been knocked to the floor.



The culprit was not to be found during day visits to the house but there was repeated damage over several nights. And he was obviously not aware of the toilet facilities attached to the building which made daily room cleaning even more unpleasant.

On entering the building on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> there was a strong smell of alcohol. An almost full cask of Chardonnay left over from the Society's end of year dinner in December was empty and some of the contents spilt on the floor. The tap on the cask had obviously been difficult to operate by hand as there were teeth marks around it.

The squatter was located in 'Harry's Room' at the front of the building, where most of the damage had been done, curled up fast asleep and unable to be woken, his eyes shut tight and whiskers quivering with each drunken snore.

Following an examination and medical clearance and time to sober up, the rogue, named Chardonnay by the examining medical team, was relocated to satisfactory housing close to 728 Main Road.

The Committee has decided not to report this incident to the police or take legal action against 'Chardonnay' for the damage done to property and records as it would just be a waste of time to try and bring charges against a possum.

### **SHILLINGLAW FAMILY HISTORY**

We conclude the story by English Shillinglaw descendant Elizabeth Crawford of the family's journey to Australia. In the January Newsletter we had just reached the point where the ship India with its load of emigrants had escaped from pirates.

#### ***'Glad were they to rest on Australia's shore' (Part 2)***

*It was about a fortnight after this encounter that, on 19 July, the India met its nemesis. As Philip Shillinglaw put it:*

***At two of the clock, on the India they dined.  
At six of the clock she was left behind  
A glowing ball, burnt down to the water  
To disappear, when the winds had caught her.***

The disaster, he wrote, was due to the actions of the second mate (another report says the third mate), 'a drunken fiend', who went into the hold to fill a two-gallon measure with rum for the occupants of the state cabin.

***But he could not stand  
Steady, staggering with candle in hand..  
At last he let fall  
His candle...***

*[Then]*

***Seizing the full measure with might and main  
He dashed its contents right onto the flame  
So quickly it caught, blazed up and flared  
Beyond all control. For no-one dared  
To face that inferno***

The rather more prosaic report in the Times, provided by a cabin passenger, corroborates this story. The ship, 600 miles from the nearest land, was quickly ablaze. Death would have been inevitable for all had it not been for the fortuitous presence, about nine miles away, of a French whaler, the Roland. Even so, the blazing India was only spotted when the Roland's carpenter climbed its rigging to make a repair. The Roland hurried to the rescue, lowering all her boats. The India's boats, too, had been launched, but the first



upturned when swamped by those desperate to clamber aboard, drowning 17 passengers and the boatswain. There was, anyway, only capacity for a third of the India's passengers in its own long-boats. The India's first mate then took charge of a second boat and used it to ferry passengers to those of the Roland.

**To the ship they rowed  
Returning-discharged-taking load after load,  
Until, all were saved from the wreck, at last.  
A fearful ordeal. But now it is past  
Both my Father and my Mother were there  
But they were not yet made into a pair.**

The Times reporter wrote that 'all was one scene of confusion and despair, the women were wringing their hands in the most heart rending manner, and this, mingled with screaming of children, presented a scene it would be vain to attempt describing.' He also noted that the long-boat had to be cleared of 'pigs, goats, &c., which were tossed overboard. 'He described how, with his fellow passengers, he had doubted that the Roland would reach them in time as the India 'was now one glowing mass of flame from stem to stern below, and rising through the hatches, and running up the rigging with incredible velocity. In less than one hour from the commencement of the fire her mainmast was lying over her lee-side.' The surviving passengers were eventually picked up, many naked. Steerage and cabin passengers alike, they had lost all their possessions. It is salutary to note that during the 19th century at least 26 ships foundered on the voyage to Australia.

**On deck of the Roland, now, safely they stand  
In mid Atlantic, a fortunate band...  
Rio-Janaro's the port – the name of the town  
Where landed, and left to wander alone.**

The Roland arrived at Rio di Janeiro on 26 July. There the emigrants were fortunate to be looked after by a remarkably considerate consul. Robert Hesketh's correspondence with the Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, records the effort made to ensure the comfort of the survivors and to find and equip a ship to carry them on to Australia. Hesketh found lodgings for all and, as he reported, 'The British residents most charitably and liberally contributed Clothes.' For the sum of £1549 he chartered another ship, the Grindlay, writing to Palmerston, 'I shall have to draw on Her Majesty's Treasury for the Sum, and also for the cost of Victualling the Emigrants during the Voyage. The expense of lodging, Victualling and Clothing in the place will form another item for which I shall also have to draw on Her Majesty's Treasury. By thus acting, I hope to afford the assistance required from me by those unfortunate individuals in a manner that will meet your Lordship's approval.' Palmerston did not approve. However wiser counsels prevailed. It was pointed out that if this group of emigrants was left destitute in Rio all schemes for colonial emigration would be brought into disrepute.

The Grindlay sailed from Rio on 22 August. The widows of three drowned passengers returned to Scotland with their children. In addition, three women and two men had 'absconded', presumably tempted by the bright lights of Rio.

Hesketh appointed one of the India's passengers, William Lilburne, as Superintendent of the Grindlay, giving 'him charge of all the provisions, furnishing him with General Instructions, and with a set of regulations and Diet Scale which were notified to the Emigrants'. Hesketh wrote to the Governor of Port Phillip, 'I consider myself fortunate in having had the assistance of such a person as Mr Lilburne to superintend on shore, in this Place, such a collection of persons under such trying circumstances, and his respectability, Discrimination and firmness makes me confident that the Passengers will be comfortable.' Lilburne, who had been born in Perth in 1811, was given a testimonial to further his prospect of employment in Port Phillip.

It is noteworthy that Hesketh considered Lilburne better able to ensure the welfare of the passengers than the ship's surgeon, Mr Houston, to whom, as was usual, they had previously been entrusted. Houston later appealed against the loss of gratuity resulting from this demotion, finally being offered half the money he might otherwise have received. William Lilburne received a free passage and a gratuity of £36.

British residents in Rio had raised a fund which provided the emigrants with clothing, some tools and Mr Houston with some medical instruments. The fund must have been substantial because a balance of £501 7s was left to be divided amongst the emigrants on their arrival at Port Phillip. A sum was also given to the



returning widows. The master of the Roland was presented with a gold chronometer and his crew a reward, shared between them, of £40.

There were no more adventures and the Grindlay disembarked at Port Phillip on 22 October 1841, one of 42 ships, carrying 7716 emigrants, that arrived that year from Britain.

**Glad were they to rest on Australia's shore.  
But thankful indeed, the voyage is o'er.  
Some came as servants, engaged ere they came,  
As station hands some, all treated the same.  
'Tis a wild new land: Native tribes abound  
"Plenty Blackfellow", there wand'ring around**

Port Phillip, soon to be renamed Melbourne, was clearly very different from Aberdalgie.

Phillip worked as a market gardener at Merri Creek, on the outskirts of Melbourne, until his death in 1852. In 1847 William was a gardener to 'Government gardens', probably the precursor of what is now the world-famous Melbourne Botanical Gardens. Caroline married in 1843 and had at least four children before dying in 1856. Elizabeth married in Melbourne in 1846, with her father present at the wedding. William Lilburne, a widower when he embarked, with at least two of his children, on the India had married, soon after his arrival at Port Phillip, a fellow passenger, Christina McDougall. They had three children before divorcing. In 1853 he married Martha Shillinglaw.

The Shillinglaws thrived in Australia, the family increasing rapidly down the generations. Phillip the versifier settled in the Melbourne suburb of Eltham, where the brick house in which he and his family lived has been restored and preserved, as Shillinglaw Cottage. In 1991 Margaret Ball organised a reunion for the descendants of those Shillinglaws who had, 'with hearts all elate at what is before', endured such danger to travel to that 'wild new land'.

## **MORE COMING EVENTS**

On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> May we will be hosting the Annual Conference of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies. The venue will be the Eltham Court House and our Local History Centre will also be open for the delegates' inspection. The assistance of members will be required for the serving of morning and afternoon teas and also lunch. Anyone able to assist on the day is asked to advise Gwen Orford on 9439 8642.



Because of the conference we will not be holding our usual public heritage walk on that day but there may be a similar walk available for delegates. There have been a number of enquiries about a "mud brick walk" as an alternative to our normal series of walks. We will try and arrange such a walk for later in May and details will be in the May Newsletter.



Don't forget our records workshops where members can come along to the Local History Centre and do their own research on our files or help with our long slow process of getting our records into proper order. Dates for coming workshops are:-

Mondays 9.30am  
Tuesdays 7.30pm

17<sup>th</sup> March and 21<sup>st</sup> April  
1<sup>st</sup> April and 6<sup>th</sup> May

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