

# **ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Incorporated**

No. A0016285F

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## **NEWSLETTER NO. 181 JULY 2008**

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

**8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 9<sup>TH</sup> JULY  
GUEST SPEAKER LESLEY ALVES  
"EVERYBODY HAS A STORY TO TELL"**



The Shillinglaw Trees and Shillinglaw  
Cottage – from a sketch by Peter Glass

See Page 2

### **WALKS PROGRAM**

**MUD BRICK WALK  
10.30 AM SATURDAY 26 JULY**

**HERITAGE WALKS  
2.00 PM SATURDAY 5 JULY  
SATURDAY 6 SEPT**

**ELTHAM LOCAL  
HISTORY CENTRE  
BOOKINGS 9439 9717**

## **JULY MEETING**

Lesley Alves is a local historian who specialises in oral history. Often her work might start out by recording the stories of people involved in a particular project but finishes up as a book or report. But she has a particular interest in the spoken words of the people she is working with. This leads to the title of her talk – "Everybody has a Story to Tell".

Lesley will explain the techniques of oral history and the importance of obtaining personal accounts of recent history. She will include some interesting stories from her research, some of them by excerpts of recorded interviews. There will be some local examples for additional interest.

Lesley's experience extends over twenty years as a history consultant to councils, the National Trust, companies and professional associations. This wide experience provides an excellent background for this informative and interesting subject.

## **THE SHILLINGLAW TREES**

Nillumbik Shire Council is currently examining options for a new civic centre to replace the present facility in Civic Drive, Greensborough.

The proposal that has received the most attention is to construct a new civic centre on the site of the former Eltham Shire Offices at 895 Main Road, Eltham.

This proposal has proceeded to the stage of preparing concept plans for an innovative energy efficient building on this site. The plans have been displayed at public consultative meetings and have recently been publicised in the local press.

The design of the project requires removal of the historic Shillinglaw trees that have been a feature of this site for very many years. One of the three trees has been assessed by arboricultural reports as being in decline and is likely to die within the short term. The proposal is to relocate the other two to another position on the site. An arborist's report and advice from a firm experienced in large tree relocation state that there is a high chance of successful relocation.

These trees have been the subject of a number of heritage reports that confirm their historic significance. They are covered by the Heritage Overlay under the Nillumbik Planning Scheme and a planning permit would be required for their removal.

In 1996 the future of the trees was threatened by a proposal to develop this site for a petrol station and fast food outlet. A report on the trees was included in our January 1997 Newsletter and that report has now been adapted to the current situation to form the balance of this article.

The three Mediterranean Cypress trees (*Cupressus sempervirens*) originally were part of the garden of Shillinglaw Cottage which occupied the site prior to erection of the Eltham Shire Offices. The cottage was relocated about 200 metres to the south where it is now used as a restaurant.

Research at the time of construction of the Shire Offices (1963/4) suggested that the cottage was built in the late 1850's. More recent research (carried out by Carlotta Kellaway for the Eltham Heritage Study) indicates that it was built in 1878 by prominent local builder George Stebbing. Soon after it was purchased by Phillip Shillinglaw and was occupied by his family until it was purchased by the Council. At the time of purchase the cottage was home to two Misses Shillinglaw, daughters of Phillip.

Shillinglaw Cottage is classified by the National Trust and listed on the Register of the National Estate. It is covered by the Heritage Overlay under the Nillumbik Planning Scheme.



The age of the trees is unknown. The Eltham Heritage Study estimates that they were planted c.1920. However, photos known to be taken prior to 1906 show two of the trees as being more than twice as high as the cottage. They were substantial trees then and we estimate their age to be c.100 years. The third tree must have been planted later but is still of great age.

The trees stood in a rather overgrown garden at the front of the cottage and early views along Main Road show them as a distinctive landmark.

In 1963/4 the Eltham Shire Council was proceeding with its proposals to construct new shire offices on the site. There was local concern as to the fate of the cottage. The Shillinglaw Cottage Preservation Committee was formed by local residents with the objective of relocating the cottage on nearby Council land. Funds were raised and the cottage was dismantled, then rebuilt and restored over several years being completed about 1971. The original proposal for its use as a museum has not eventuated and it is used as a restaurant.

The trees were retained on their original site. They were in an awkward position close to the front of the Shire Office building and a conscious decision must have been made to retain them, indicating that they were considered at the time to be of some importance. It would have been quite easy at the time of construction to have removed the trees but it is significant that they were retained.

From time to time since 1965 the question of removal was raised in the context of office security and it was even said that they detracted from the appearance of the office. Again it is significant that the trees have been retained over this period because of their heritage value.

The Eltham Shire office building was demolished in August 1996. There appears to have been no specific intention by the Council or the contractor to either remove or retain the Shillinglaw trees. However, because of their proximity to the building they were in significant danger of damage. Due to the action of Harry Gilham, President of this Society, agreement was reached with the contractor for protection of the trees so that their future remained to be assessed.

Shillinglaw Cottage once stood on lot 90 of Holloway's 1851 "Little Eltham" subdivision which had an area of 12 hectares (39 acres). Over the years large parts were acquired by the Council for parks and road and by the Government for the railway. Part was purchased by the Eltham War Memorial Trust and other smaller parts were sold privately. At the time of acquisition by Council of the cottage, its land was only 0.8 hectares (2 acres) in area. The only evidence remaining on the cottage site or, in fact, any of lot 90 of the Shillinglaw's long occupation is the three cypress trees.

The reports in 1996 indicated that the trees would not survive relocation and their cultural significance would be significantly diminished by relocation. The current advice is that there is a high chance of survival provided that they are moved to a nearby location – that is lifted by a crane and placed in their new location in one operation. Their cultural significance would still be diminished by removal to a new location on this site but not so much as would be the case if they were moved to another site.

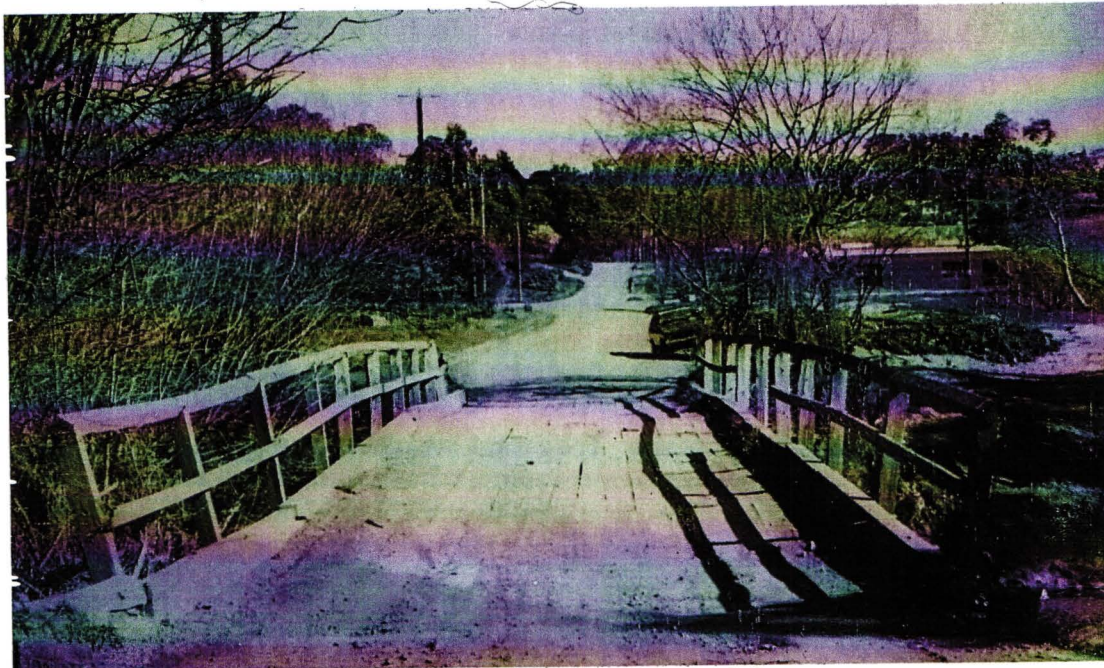
The Society's Committee has considered this matter and has decided that we are opposed to the relocation of the trees. We think that if this proposal is to proceed then the design should provide for the trees to remain in their current location.

### **BROUGHAM STREET BRIDGE**

Nilumbik Shire Council has advised that it proposes to replace the bridge over the Diamond Creek at Brougham Street, Eltham. This timber trestle bridge has heritage significance and is covered by



the Heritage Overlay in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. A planning permit is required for its demolition.



Brougham Street Bridge c1960s



The old log girder bridge in Brougham Street

The Statement of Cultural Significance in the Shire of Eltham Heritage Study (David Bick and others) is as follows:-

*The Brougham Street trestle bridge illustrates a traditional bridge building technology once seen throughout the Shire of Eltham, but now quite rare. Though no doubt rebuilt, this bridge is*



*probably the more intact of the two surviving timber trestle road bridges in Eltham and is a direct link with the early decades of settlement in the Shire. Unusually for such a bridge, the western end span is twice the width of the other two.*

Brougham Street was created in Josiah Holloway's 1851 subdivision of Little Eltham. It was one of several east-west streets shown on the subdivision plan as crossing the Diamond Creek. The western part was named Wellington Street on the subdivision plan but was later changed to conform with the name of the eastern part as acknowledgement of the continuity of the street.

It is not known when the first bridge was constructed in Brougham Street. A very old photo (possibly early 1900s) shows a very low level simple log girder bridge crossing the creek at a right angle and so the approaches involved bends in the road alignment. This bridge is understood to have been known as Kaylocks (or Keylocks) Bridge after the owner of adjoining land.

It is not known when the low level bridge was changed to the present higher level timber trestle bridge. An engineering assessment carried out for the Council by MacLeod Consulting suggests that the construction details indicate that it was in the 1900s. Most, and possibly all of the bridge components, have been replaced over the lifetime of the bridge but it retains the typical form of timber road bridges of earlier years. It provides for a single lane of traffic and is below the nominated flood level for the creek.

Larger timber trestle road bridges over the Diamond Creek were constructed in the 1870s at Main Road and Bridge Street. Both have been replaced by concrete bridges. The bridge at Diamond Street retains a timber trestle sub-structure but now has a steel tray deck.

The Brougham Street bridge is the only road bridge over the Diamond Creek in Eltham that is still largely in its original form.

The MacLeod Consulting report recommends that it be retained and restored on this basis.

The Council has conducted several consultation meetings involving local residents and other interested parties in relation to the replacement proposal. Its position is that the bridge has deteriorated to the extent that it must be replaced rather than restored. A concept design has been prepared with the intention of providing a new bridge as close as possible to the appearance of the old bridge. Modifications have been made to the design to reflect comments made at the consultative meetings. The present level and width of the bridge are proposed to be retained although they would normally be considered to be below present day standards.

The Society has been represented at the consultative meetings but at this stage does not have a formal position on replacement of the bridge. If it turns out to be inevitable that the old bridge is demolished then it would be appropriate that it be commemorated by appropriate signage or some other feature at the site.

### **WALKS PROGRAM**

Unfortunately it was necessary to Cancel our mud brick walk in May at short notice. It now has been rescheduled for Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> July.

We will be continuing our usual first Saturday heritage walks during the rest of the year. The next two walks will be 5 July and 6 September. They will start at 2 pm at the Local History Centre. For those that missed the details of the mud brick walk in the May Newsletter they are repeated here.

It is proposed to conduct a number of short walks in precincts of Eltham where there are groups of mud brick houses. Transport between the precincts will be by car and car pooling may be arranged. Most individual walks will be just a few hundred metres but there will be one walk of



about 1.5 kilometres. A number of the houses are of heritage significance. The proposal is to walk past and discuss these houses rather than visit them.

The program will start at the Eltham Local History Centre at 10.30 am and will return there for lunch. You will need to bring your own lunch or stop somewhere to buy it on the way. You can do as many or as few of the individual short walks as you wish.

There is no charge for either members or others for the mud brick walk or other walks. Ring Russell Yeoman or email to [edhs@bigpond.com](mailto:edhs@bigpond.com) for bookings or further details.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The 'who's who' in the Nillumbik Shire's historical societies and heritage groups now number nine with two singular partners. Overall the Shire's groups have a total of some 434 square kms. to cover, meaning around 53 square kms. EACH.

So where and who are those groups? Apart from our own Society there are Nillumbik (Diamond Creek) Historical Society, Warrandyte Historical Society, Yarrambat Historical Society, Plenty Historical Society, St Andrews/Queenstown Historical Society, Andrew Ross Museum at Kangaroo Ground, Friends and Relations of Queenstown Cemetery, Hurstbridge and District Local History Group. Along with these are the Discovery Trails project of Dennis Ward and the Nillumbik Tourism Association.

Five times a year these groups meet to exchange ideas, discuss and plan assistance for each other's functions.

Two important items are coming up for the 2008 calendar:-

Hurstbridge Wattle Festival 30 August

St. Andrews 150<sup>th</sup> celebration 29-30 November

Harry Gilham

## **OTHER NEWS**

Each month records workshops are held on the first Tuesday in the evening and the third Monday in the morning. Currently we are working on identifying the location of the various items in our collection. We are encouraging all members to come along to at least one of the forthcoming workshops to have a "tour" of the collection. The more people who know the scope of the collection and the location of the main components, the easier it will be to deal with enquiries from visitors, researchers or people following up their family history. Coming workshop dates are:-

Mondays 9.30am  
Tuesdays 7.30pm

21<sup>st</sup> July and 18<sup>th</sup> August  
5<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> September  
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Subscriptions for 2008-9 are now due. Details of current subscriptions were set out in the last newsletter. Many people have now paid but David will be pleased to receive those remaining at the July meeting or through the mail.

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President

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