

# **ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Incorporated**

**No. A0016285F**

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

**Website: [www.tinyurl.com/elthamdhs](http://www.tinyurl.com/elthamdhs)**

**Email: [edhs1@bigpond.com](mailto:edhs1@bigpond.com)**

## **NEWSLETTER**

**NO. 187 JULY 2009**

### **NEXT MEETING**

**8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 8<sup>th</sup> JULY**

### **PANEL PRESENTATION**

**STORIES FROM OUR FILES**

**ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE**

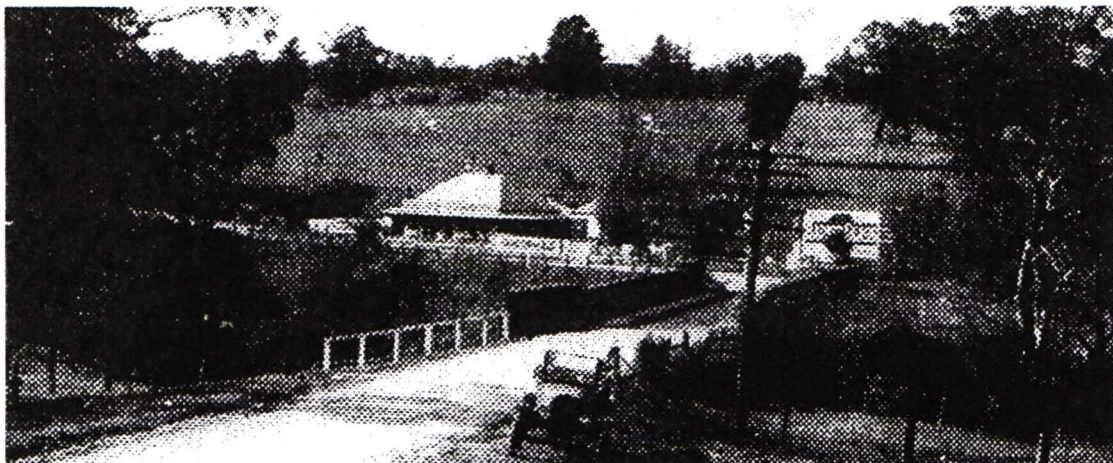
**LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM**

**(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)**

### **JULY HERITAGE WALK**

**2.00 PM SATURDAY 4<sup>th</sup> JULY**

**STARTS AT OLD LOWER PLENTY BRIDGE**



**Old Lower Plenty Bridge, starting point for July heritage walk.  
Former Plenty Bridge Hotel beyond.**

## **JULY MEETING**

Our Society's collection of documents contains a wide variety of historical information relating to the Eltham district and the former Shire of Eltham.

There are files relating to local people and families, localities, particular places, events and much more. There are a number of files relating to particular subjects or projects and included in these is an extensive collection relating to research by Harry Gilham on a wide range of subjects. Harry has also been largely responsible for the wall displays at our Local History Centre featuring photographs, maps and historical information.

Many of our files are not properly catalogued at this stage and that job is an on-going task. Few of the files are well known to members and this is a situation that is worth correcting, not just at one meeting but perhaps on the basis of one such meeting each year.

At the July meeting there will be a series of short talks by members of the Society's Committee telling stories selected from our files. Subjects chosen by the speakers include:

- The 1934 fire at the Eltham Shire Offices, Kangaroo Ground;
- Reminiscences of R. D. Taylor of Eltham;
- The David Harbison Home for Boys;
- The land purchases of Henry Stooke, local pioneer;
- Murder at the Eltham Bakery.

Each subject will be illustrated with digital slides, arranged by Jim Connor. The wide variety of subject matter and the varying approach of the different speakers should provide an entertaining and informative meeting.

## **JULY HERITAGE WALK**

As part of our regular series of heritage walks, it has been decided to base the July walk on Anne Paul's most interesting talk on the lower Plenty River at our May meeting. It will include sites of historic interest along the river at Lower Plenty, Viewbank and Yallambie.

The walk will be on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> July and will commence at 2pm on the western side of the old main road bridge in Old Lower Plenty Road, Viewbank (Melway Ref. 20 K9). Anyone wanting transport from Eltham should meet at the Eltham Local History Centre at 1.45pm. The walk will take about two hours. The distance will be between 3 and 4 kilometres, going first downstream to the locality of the original ford, then upstream to view "Yallambie" homestead, both from the street and the river parkland at the rear.

Anne Paul has agreed to come and will be able to discuss some of the sites mentioned in her talk. We may also be joined by members of the Friends of the Lower Plenty River. The walk is open to Society members and the public. There is no charge.

Ring Russell on 9439 9717 to advise if you are coming or for further information. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.

## **JOSEPHINE GORDON McCORMICK – 1925-2009**

Sadly we advise of the death on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009 of Jo McCormick our valued Committee member and dear friend of many of our members and also the wider Eltham community.

Jo was farewelled at a service at St Margaret's, Eltham, led by her cousin Archdeacon Phillip Newman and later laid to rest at Kangaroo Ground Cemetery.

The eulogy was written by Jo's daughter Sue and delivered at the service by Archdeacon Newman. As a tribute to Jo, we repeat it here.

*As the poem that Andy has read says, Mum was someone who noticed things. She was very connected, very engaged with life. Hers was a rich life, well-lived.*

*The poem reminds us of her great love of nature – of flowers, gardens, of sunsets and sunrises. She loved animals. This is fortunate as number 17 Livingstone Road has become THE address for any aspirational possum in Eltham. She loved the English countryside she remembered from her childhood and she came to love the Australian bush, firstly in Sydney and then in Nilumbik. She met her first Australian friends in Sydney and they remained dear to her throughout her life. As we know, she loved her garden. When asked about her spiritual beliefs she once said, "I'm not sure about that, but I know I always feel better when I'm in the garden". She delighted in sharing the garden, for example with other members of the Garden Club and, for a period of some forty years, at her famous Easter Monday gatherings.*

*Mum loved beauty and was able to see it in many places and many people. She worked on many lovely pieces of embroidery and tapestry and formed strong and lasting friendships through regular meetings with fellow embroiderers. She loved and supported art in many forms, particularly the ballet.*

*People like Mum, people who notice things, sometimes perceive need. Mum did, and she was a good woman who wanted to help people less fortunate than she was. Two examples are her involvement, in both cases over many years, with Meals on Wheels and with the Greensborough op shop run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Mum started working with the op shop when it first opened in 1978 and continued there for over twenty years. She also cherished the enduring friendships she formed there. That a significant proportion of the contents of the shop (paid in full!) came home with her each week was, of course, a bonus. When it came to Meals on Wheels, Mum went one better and brought home an elderly couple who she installed in one of the front rooms of her home.*

*Mum had a keen interest in history, and was indeed part of it, as she served in the Women's Royal Navy (the Wrens) during the Second World War. She remained in loving contact with her close comrades from that time for over sixty years. Her famous book collection includes many about history, especially naval history. Together with Andy she worked to complete five volumes of her memoirs. As well as relating her fascinating life, her memoirs show her belief in the importance of family. She cherished her English heritage and her continuing loving relationships with members of her extended family in Australia. She was a very active member of the Eltham Historical Society and it will come as no surprise to learn that she made many friends there as well.*

*Mum loved travel – which, of course, meant even more things to notice. She started early, travelling to Italy, and kept it up until last October when she travelled to Japan with Andy. She almost always had her camera at the ready and many of you will*

*have enjoyed going through her photos with her. Her strongest links were with Italy. She met our father there and subsequently lived there happily on three occasions. She maintained a connection with Melbourne University, where Dad was Professor of Italian, and, in his memory, endowed the McCormick Scholarship, given to outstanding students of Italian. She also made dear friends through her connection with the university. Mum's love of Italy and its people ran throughout her life, and members of her beloved adopted Italian family are here today.*

*So Mum noticed and appreciated nature and art and history and travel and boats and sailing and reading and poetry ... the list goes on. This certainly made for an interesting life, but her life was more than 'interesting'. She lived a rich life and this was because of her love for people and theirs for her.*

*She loved her friends, she loved her family and she loved those people who were a bit of both, like her exceptionally kind neighbours. She dearly loved our Father Colin and she will go to join him at Kangaroo Ground today. Our brother Ian is going with Mum today too. As much as Mum loved Ian, we think she had her doubts as to whether he would make it into conventional heaven. Those of you who knew Ian will possibly see her point! However, Mum was very taken with some lines from the songwriter Rod McKuen:*

*"Some place green, some place nice  
Some place that men call paradise"*

*and thought that Ian would be welcome in such a place. It doesn't really matter, because Ian will be with Mum again and that will be good.*

*We loved Mum and we know you did too, whether you knew her as Jo, Mum, Auntie Jo, Cousin Jo, Nonna or Mrs Mac. Thank you for joining us today to remember her and to be thankful for the time we were able to spend with her."*

## **MORE NEWS**

Noted historian and author Dr Andrew Lemon is a resident of Eltham and has been a member of our Society for many years. Andrew has recently been elected as President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria. We congratulate him on achieving this prestigious position.

Andrew has written a number of local histories and books on more general subjects. In recent years he has been most well known for his works on the history of horse racing in Victoria.

Due to his busy schedule with these wider historical interests, Andrew has not had a significant active involvement with our Society but has accepted invitations as speaker at several meetings. He has made an interesting contribution to our local history as editor of "Return to Research – A Centenary History of Research Primary School"

\*\*\*\*\*

Peter Bassett-Smith is a life member and former President of our Society and has been involved in researching and recording local history for longer than the Society has existed. In particular, Peter has had many years of involvement in recording local history and events on film. In recent times Peter has been involved with staff of the National Library and National Museum in compiling a digital record of some of his films for the collection of these national bodies. We look forward to seeing the result of this work, perhaps at a meeting next year.

At our recent Annual General Meeting Harry Gilham retired as Society President after 16 years in this position. We included a tribute to Harry's work over the years in our May Newsletter and as a further tribute, a presentation was made to Harry at our May meeting. He was presented with a platter made by local potters, Chris and Mary Lou Pittard, featuring pictures of some of the local features with which he has been involved, including the Eltham Justice Precinct, Eltham Primary School, Kangaroo Ground Memorial Tower and the Eltham Library.

\*\*\*\*\*

Don't forget that subscriptions for 2009-10 are now due. Most members have now paid. Check with Treasurer, David Johns, if you are not sure if you have paid. Full details of current subscriptions were given in the May Newsletter and for new members are shown on our membership application form.

### ANOTHER STORY FROM OUR FILES

In a collection of Victorian Parliamentary Papers 1864-5 we found this report of the Collector of Agricultural Statistics for the County of Evelyn. Contrary to the common perception of statistical information as a rather dull subject, the report provides some very interesting observations on the local events of the time.

#### COUNTY OF EVELYN

SIR

Templestowe, 31st March 1864.

*The year 1863 will be ever memorable to the agriculturists of Evelyn, as the one in which they suffered more loss from the floods of the Yarra and its tributaries than from any other flood on record, since the colonization of the country in 1835. Crossing the Yarra by a boat (the Templestowe bridge being swept away by the flood), the first farm I visited was one in the occupation of Mr. Thomas Mundy, situated at the junction of the Yarra with the Plenty – it is the finest farm on the Yarra; this farm was covered by the waters of both rivers, and a crop of seventy acres of potatoes entirely destroyed, after being twice planted. The loss to Mr Mundy in each case of flooding was equal to £7000. I may here observe that Mr Mundy is the best ploughman in Victoria, having carried off the chief prizes in all matches within ten miles of Melbourne. His landlord, Mr. John Porter, generously forgave the rent, and provides seed for next season – a conduct so generous as to have met with imitators. Mr Mundy's father, who occupies the next farm, was also a great sufferer, but not to the same extent as his son, his land lying higher. Their neighbours, Henry Stooks, Esq., J.P., Mr. Swanston, Mr. John Brown, Mr. Batt, all skilful agriculturists, suffered more or less loss, and the same fate attended all the small farmers occupying the vallies of the Plenty, Diamond and Aitken's Creeks.*

*But it is not the flood of December alone which caused the scanty harvests of Evelyn. From the beginning of the spring, in August, up to January, there was a constant and daily fall of rain, accompanied by cold southerly winds and tempestuous weather (which, now goes by the name of Saxby's weather) with little or no sun to bring the blossoms of cereals to perfection. The wheat grown under such adverse circumstances was so small in the grain that on the best lands in the county there was no wheat reaped fit for flour, the grain being so small as to be only fit for poultry. There was no sun to dry the hay, and there is scarcely a good stack of hay in the county, most of it being black from continued tempestuous weather. No corn could properly ripen, rust came on the wheat, caterpillars destroyed the oats, and the seed planted for potatoes rotted in the ground; in many cases land was seeded twice, and*

there were some cases of planting this much required tuber three times. Fortunately, good crops of potatoes were grown inland at Lancefield, at other places along the west coast, Warmambool, Belfast, and Portland, which, with a fine crop in Tasmania, keeps the market well supplied at moderate rates.

South Evelyn fared no better than the North, and the occupiers of land on the Bolinda, or Running Creek, the Brushy and Anderson's Creeks, were all sufferers to a great extent, both in corn and cattle, a great number of the latter being drowned.

As a set-off against this unexampled year of agricultural depression, gold reefs have been found on Dr. Phillip's land, on Aitken's Creek, who has a powerful crushing machine of twelve stampers worked by steam, and making good returns. This reef is fifteen miles from Melbourne, by the Greensboro' road, over the Plenty Bridge. The leads from Dr. Phillip's land have been traced into Crown land, and there is every hope of its being able to support a mining community. Already stores, butchers' shops, a large hotel, and even a school, point out the situation of the future town; and as it is surrounded by small farmers, they will be able next year to supply the miners with all they require. The once-famed Kangaroo Ground, which is like an oasis in a desert, consisting of about one thousand acres of the finest land in Australia, situated among barren hills, has this year no crops; the general blight of last season ruined the farmers' hopes, and this district, which once yielded ten thousand bushels of wheat a year, has scarcely as many hundreds. From hence to Tarrawarra is a walk of fourteen miles, through a hilly and barren country. Tarrawarra is a very fine grazing country, well fenced in paddocks, and occupied by the junior branches of the affluent families of the Donaldsons, Bells, Armstrong's, &c., who, twenty years ago, first occupied the Kangaroo Ground. Tarrawarra bids fair to become a considerable place. The road to New Chum, on Watt's River, passes through it, and a bridge is contemplated to be thrown over the Yarra from Yering, thus uniting the great Gipps Land Road, which traverses South Evelyn, after passing through Boroondara and Nunawading, to unite with the Eltham road at Tarrawarra, the road from thence being good as far as New Chum – a great depot for all manner of stores, which have to be packed from thence to the Jordan, Jericho, Wood's Point, and all the upper Gipps Land country, full of the richest gold reefs in the world. Beyond New Chum, large parties are employed to make the road passable before winter approaches.

The hopes of the colony are fixed on these reefs, as a vast field of mining enterprise and successful and paying labor. At Tarrawarra, a large and new hotel, built by the Bells, is ready to receive travellers. If the farmers were disappointed in their cereal produce, the abundance of the dairy produce is, in some measure, a set-off; the grass never was so fine, and continues so. The whole County of Evelyn teems with milk and butter; many farmers have by them tons of the latter article, which they keep for a more remunerative price; they would be satisfied with a shilling a pound, but many of the poorer sort of dairy farmers have to quit it at ninepence. The cattle are everywhere in fine condition, and though many suffered earlier in the year from pleuro-pneumonia, it seems to be much abated in Evelyn. The vineyards have suffered considerably from blight, and the yield will not be so good as last season; but it has not discouraged the vignerons of either South or North Evelyn. Messrs. Castello, De Pusy, and Langden, in South Evelyn, and Mr. Beer, in North Evelyn, are making great and praiseworthy efforts to establish what is most likely to happen in a few years, viz., the export of Australian wines to all parts of the world, and the extinction of the consumption of bad spirits by the hard-working man and others – a consummation devoutly to be wished for, whether looking at it in a commercial, sanitary, or religious point of view, and more likely to be practically useful to the hard-working sun-burnt laborers in fields than teetotalism, by abolishing the use

of the vile stuff sold as genuine rum or port wine, which never was made in the West Indies or Oporto either, and their using such wine as the Yering, Boroondara, Geelong, and other vineyards produce. The Yering wine, such as I tasted a few weeks ago at Castella's and De Pusy's, both red and white is refreshing and strong enough to make a tired man renew his journey with a consciousness that he has imbibed a liquor which renews his strength for exertion without intoxicating him.

I everywhere found complaints about schools. At Warrandyte, a village of 250 inhabitants, the school was closed, from some difficulty about the pay: the scholars numbering not quite 40, but 30 odd. In the hill country of the parish, at Holme's Creek, I came upon a community of about ten farms, the houses in sight of each other; the children fit for school numbered about 20. I found other localities in other parishes, similarly situated. The schoolmaster of Lilly Dale, a considerable village, on the Bolinda, complained he had no state assistance. The Schoolmaster of Arthur's Creek, a considerable village, near Phillip's gold reef, and others, made similar complaints, in which they were joined by the inhabitants. They contend that if there is a community of ten farms or more, and they choose a schoolmaster, that he should receive aid, not less than £26 or more than £52 a year, the said communities being upwards of two miles from any other school; for the inhabitants can do little or nothing this year to assist in paying for their children. They don't want men well up in algebra or the classics, but men who can teach them figures up to "Practice," and to read and write correctly. It is a singular fact, that university men and accomplished scholars sicken, as village teachers, over "A B C," "bi," "bo," and "ba," and produce the worst scholars; they were meant for grammar schools in towns, or private tutors in rich families.

My attention was called to the state of the Arts, which are not patronised to any great extent in this rich community. Art was better patronised thirty years ago in Tasmania, where lived Mr. Glover, a celebrated landscape painter of the first quarter of this century; he came out a settler about 1830, his three sons having preceded him. I knew him well, and having travelled over Tasmania, used to accompany him to point out views for pictures; his price was 100 guineas; he drew a picture for Sir Alfred Stephen, Chief Justice of New South Wales, of his villa, near Hobart Town, and was patronised by every man of taste and wealth; he drew a picture of Cascade near Launceston, reckoned one of his best. His pictures, when not specially ordered, found their way to London, and sold at his price. He died at Ben Lomond, in Tasmania, about twelve years ago; I mention him to encourage such splendid artists as we possess, Messrs. Von Guerard and Chevalier, and others. In my late journey, I noticed views which would make splendid pictures, such as Whittlesea, from a hill on the Yan Yean side of the Plenty; a view of the Yan Yean, including Bear's Tower; such artists would be patronised for such pictures by a patron on each spot, George Sherwin Esq., J.P., for the Whittlesea one, also Thomas Wills, Esq., J.P., and for one of Yan Yean, Thomas Bear, Esq. A fine picture could be made of the Kangaroo Ground, from a hill on the same side, and a little beyond the twenty-mile post, on the Eltham Road; and another might be made from the hill descending on Tarrawarra, it might include a portion of the Yarra, Yering on the other side, including Castella's house and vineyards. The patrons of the two latter pictures would be the residents, - the Bells, Donaldsons, Armstrongs, and others, Paul De Castella, and Honorable William Nicholson. I may here mention that conveyances go daily to these spots. Another picture could be taken of Heidelberg, from a point of view on the Bulleen side, a mile above Ricardo's, besides the village of Heidelberg, it would embrace the villas of John Porter, Esq., Doctor Martin, Jo. Handon, and the Heidelberg Church. The coast scenery is very fine, and many good pictures could be made in the Bay;

*Point King, on the Point Nepean side of the Bay, would make a good picture, taken from a boat moored off the land, with Arthur's seat in view. I shall be glad if these hints are of any use to artists seeking for the picturesque in this country.*

*Lastly, I come to the most important matter of this report, the question, – shall the agriculturists, who wish it, be helped by the state to seed wheat and seed potatoes? This question is now before the Council of the Board of Agriculture, on a petition for help made by the farmers of Indented Head. I have no hesitation in saying they should be helped, and seed lent, payable on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> March; it has been done in Tasmania, and answered well forty years ago, and enabled that island to help New South Wales, generally afflicted, in those days by a triennial drought.*

*If help was required to ascertain the quantity of seed required by each county, I volunteer to visit every holding in Evelyn and make out a list of those requiring a load of seed. The road boards who are idle now, for want of cash, could give the best and most reliable information, and no seed should be lent without an order, signed by the chairman and two members of the board. The collector having to call at every holding for road rates, could afford the board his opinion upon every application; he should also be a volunteer inspector to see the seed lent applied to the purpose for which it was loaned. In conclusion, I beg to remark, that as an agent from your department, I was everywhere treated with hospitality and kindness, and in all cases the information sought was readily given, people having now a more correct notion of the utility of your department.*

*Respectfully submitted by  
Your obedient humble servant,  
JOHN JAMES  
Collector for Evelyn*

## ITEMS FOR YOUR DIARY

Coming dates for records workshops at our Local History Centre are as follows:

Mondays - 9.30am : 20<sup>th</sup> July; 17<sup>th</sup> August

Tuesdays - 7.30pm : 7<sup>th</sup> July; 4<sup>th</sup> August

Members are encouraged to attend the records workshops to assist with filing of records or to carry out private research or reading.

As we have previously reported Marysville Historical Society lost its premises and its records in the Black Saturday bushfires. They now have new premises in Marysville on a six months lease. They need help with any relevant items for their collection, either by donation or for copying. They also need help in setting up their new premises on Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays for the foreseeable future. Ring Mary Keneally on 9874 4085 or 0417 596 433 if you can help.

Yarra Plenty Regional Library in conjunction with Whittlesea City Council is conducting a Photo Preservation Workshop at Mill Park Library from 1.00 to 4.00 pm on 11th July. There is no charge but bookings are required. Contact Helen Sartin on 9217 2377 for bookings or information.

Jim Connor  
President

Russell Yeoman  
Secretary

David Johns  
Treasurer /  
Membership Secretary

Phone - 9439 5916

Phone - 9439 9717

Phone - 9434 3357