

# **ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**Incorporated**

**No. A0016285F**

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## **NEWSLETTER**

**NO. 188 SEPTEMBER 2009**

### **NEXT MEETING**

**8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 9<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER**

**SPEAKER HARRY GILHAM**

**STORIES FROM THE ELTHAM CEMETERY**

**ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE**

**LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM**

**(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)**



Unique revolving gate  
at Eltham Cemetery.  
From a 1950s photo  
By George Bell

### **HERITAGE WALKS & EXCURSIONS PROGRAM**

**2PM SATURDAY 4<sup>th</sup> SEPT.  
DIAMOND ST, ELTHAM**

**2PM SUNDAY 27<sup>th</sup> SEPT.  
ELTHAM CEMETERY**

**2PM SATURDAY 7<sup>th</sup> NOV.  
ELTHAM CEMETERY**

**SEE PAGE 2 FOR DETAILS**

## **SEPTEMBER MEETING AND ELTHAM CEMETERY EXCURSIONS**

*"A question – where does one go to find and read an endless series of tributes to those who cannot answer back or respond in any way?"*

*You could try the land that sits above the corner of Mt. Pleasant Road and Metery Road in Eltham.*

*It has been known as the Eltham Cemetery since 1858 and one finds amongst the many headstones the phrases of tribute and recognition of those who rest there such as: From grateful colleagues, My Ron our Dad, My friend Geoff, A loved and true friend, A tribute of kindly feeling, Sadly missed - deeply loved, Loved and respected, Treasured Memories, It's nice to meet, Our loved one at rest, In Loving Remembrance, Till he come, Sacred to the memory, A good life lived well, Our dear son and Peace perfect peace."*

So writes Harry Gilham and at our September meeting Harry is going to tell us the stories of just a few of the important or interesting people who have been buried at the Eltham Cemetery. In recent times, and particularly since relinquishing the presidency of our Society in March this year, Harry has been involved in extensive research of these stories.

His large and still growing file includes information on Eltham pioneers such as Thomas Sweeney, nationally important figures such as Sir William Irvine and more recent local identities such as Pauline Toner MP and Bertram Wainer.

As has been usual at recent meetings, Harry's talk will be illustrated with digital slides by courtesy of Jim Connor.

Following on from Harry's talk there will be two excursions to look at relevant sites within the cemetery. (Harry says that there is too much of interest to cover in one visit of 1½ to 2 hours).

The first visit will be on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> September and the second will take the place of our scheduled heritage walk on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> November. They will start at 2.00pm at the carpark off Metery Road (Melway ref. 21K9).

Bookings will be required through the by email to [edhs1@bigpond.com](mailto:edhs1@bigpond.com) or ring Russell on 9439 9717.

These excursions will be an excellent complement to Harry's talk at the meeting but even if you miss the meeting this will be an opportunity to explore the Cemetery with the benefit of Harry's guidance.

There will be a reminder about the November visit in the next Newsletter.

## **SEPTEMBER HERITAGE WALK**

The walk scheduled in our program for 5<sup>th</sup> September will cover the Diamond Street area of Eltham. This area known locally as "The Hill" contains a number of important heritage sites and many mud brick houses. The walk will start at the corner of Diamond Street and Youth Road (Melway ref. 21J4) at 2pm and will last about 2 hours. Transport from the Local History Centre will be available at 1.45pm. Members of the public are welcome and there is no charge. Ring Russell on 9439 9717 for information and bookings.



## JOH EBELI'S STORY

Artist Joh Ebeli has been a member of our Society for many years but his commitments with the Diamond Valley Arts Society usually prevent him from attending our meetings. In past years Joh has been involved with many Society projects including designing plaques for our Walter Withers memorial and Community Centre sculpture, producing our Society logo and constructing floats for the Eltham Festival parade.

In conversation with Sue Law, Joh agreed to write down his memories of his migration from Holland with his wife, Rie, and their adventures building a mud brick house in Eltham in the 1950s.

Here is Joh's story, written in a style that will be recognized by those who have heard him speak and with only minor editing of spelling and the like.

In June 1951 we arrived in Melbourne at the Appleton Dock. The boat trip took about 5½ weeks from Holland and we were glad it was all over. For us were waiting Gerard (my brother) and Peggy (his wife) at the North Pier and we did see them already from the boat, the "GROOTE BEER" as our boat was called. Gerard carried a big sign and written on it EBELI. We could not have missed it! For the first time, of course, we met our new family.

Gerard drove us in his new red Singer car through the city along the rail station where we did see the first palm trees. We were to meet the parents of Peggy in Richmond. We found the house very small, one centre passage and left and right rooms. Peggy we found a very pleasant girl and Gerard seems to us very keen and proud of her. We could talk a bit with our learnt English but we had to get used to this Australian English.

After we were introduced to Peggy's parents, Gerard brought us to our landlady, Mrs Elsie Cleveland, Scott Grove, Glen Iris where we had rented a one room self-standing bedroom (a sleepout) where the late dance master once slept with his wife. Also our luggage was being delivered – 11 wooden cases!! Elsie got a shock! All this could not fit into our room and we got permission to store them in the garage. I got a job as a signwriter with a paint firm. After 14 days, I found Rie in tears! What happened! The lady expected us to be at her place for only a few days (Gerard had told her). After a lot of talking, Rie got permission to stay longer. Gerard wanted us to see Eltham so he drove us in his new (low on the ground) car (Singer) (not to mix with sewing machine) where we did see for the first time house building with mud bricks. That made us enthusiastic to make a house with mud bricks. With an estate agent I bought a house block in Silver Street in Eltham. I put a deposit down on it but the next day he told me it was sold. Next was a nice double house block in Hillside Avenue but later called Batman Road.

We did know another Dutch couple who lived in St Kilda in a big room. Their name was Henk and Elly Kolk. Henk was interested to buy a block, number 65, from me for he was also interested in building with mud bricks.

We started with levelling the land with a PICK and SHOVEL! The clay ground was very hard. For making muddies we needed water, so I got a plumber and he did put on the water with a tap on our land. We made a "mud pit" and made the start of



mud bricks (2600 at the end). I had a steel form made and that was the size of the main brick. The brick was long 31cm, wide 23cm and high 15cm, weight av. 15/16 kg. Later on I had a form made with three bricks but smaller size for internal walls.

One day the bulldozer came to make the block level. He did a nice job but also levelled our new water pipe! The water was gushing all over our sun dried 300 muddies! We were proud about our bricks! It was getting near Christmas time as I remember, because the bulldozer man gave us a dead duck for making it good again.

Before we started laying the muddies, we started first to build a rammed earth shed, 2 x 3 metres. For the next two years, while still living at Mrs Cleveland's we travelled to Eltham by train every weekend and slept in the shed. We had one primus stove to prepare dinner on and four stretchers to sleep on. We used a 4 gallon drum as a toilet and before going back to town on Sunday night, the contents of the drum were buried on the spot where the plum tree later sprouted.

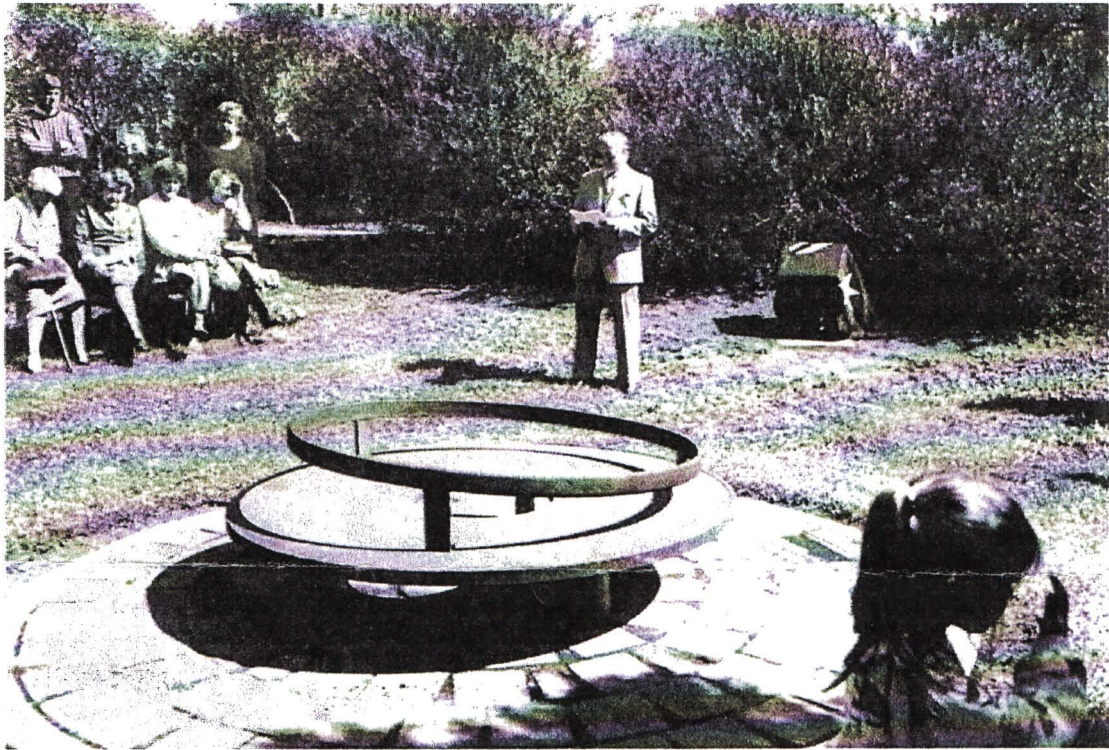
I made a design for our house (to be built) and one lucky day we met two Dutch boys in the train and they were interested to know what we were doing. We told them that we were going to Eltham where we had a house block of land. They also were building their own house. We called them the Sibbel brothers. The older one was Herman and his brother was Martin. They were builders in Amsterdam. We were very lucky to meet them because without their professional help we could never have such an excellent and solid building ever made.

Herman did not agree with my house design and wanted us to make another design. Within 2 weeks he came and showed his house design and we all did agree that this was the best we ever had seen before. We finished up with the Sibbel brothers helping us with our house until it was finished. Of course they constructed the roof and later they made all the windows and doors also.

However, a great deal of the time we had to spend on what was the foundation and base for laying the muddies on. I had permission to buy 6 tons of cement. At this time all building materials were on permits. Six tons of cement were 6 x 20 bags of cement and not included sand and gravel - volume 1 cement to sand 3 and gravel 5. Then we got the pillars to go down until we met rock. One corner pillar as 4 metres (2m deep in the ground) and the rest 2.8m high. All pillars were about 40 x 40 cm round and all concrete was reinforced with 3/8" round steel. We needed 760 metres of that reinforced steel, all to go in the boxing what had to be made and later to be filled with concrete cement. Also it is nice to know that all the "lintels" over the windows and doors were made from concrete. All the concrete beams all around the foundations of the 2 houses were minimum 40cm x 40cm wide and high also. A heavy foundation between the two houses for the centre wall. The people asked us if we were building 3 storeys high but it was hard work to fill the boxing. We needed a lot of sand and a lot of gravel and we got a cement mixer delivered from the city (that was the nearest!). We were also lucky to have a friend, Eddy Howard, who lived ten houses away from ours and was willing to work a day for me (with the barrow) and the mixer if I did for him at his place. That was a good solution - in the

hot sun that was hard labour! To fill all the boxing took several weeks and we went back to make more mud bricks again after that.





Joh Ebeli speaks at the unveiling of a plaque to the Society's monument at the Eltham Community Centre 1987. Monument and plaque designed by Joh.

The building house plan of the Sibbel design was declared OK and Herman and Martin were busy making the windows and doors for the both houses. It was our luck to have them helping us on the house with their experience and knowledge.

That everything was done to standard and the quality of work and the roof construction was done too with experience by the Sibbel brothers. We would have never had such a quality house built without their experience being master builders. Later on the brothers started out on their own in business and got rewarded the Master Builders certificate. Their business constructed one house per week but then Herman died, and that was the end of a beautiful business. His son took the business over and specialised in furniture design.

Again later on Joh followed a course in brick laying and built his studio behind his garage where he could paint and draw as much as he liked.

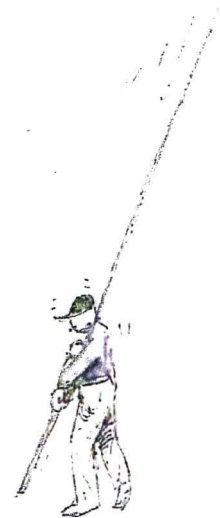
When the roof was "on", we went back to lay the floors in the house. It was rather difficult to get flooring in the "after war" situation. All I could get was very expensive flooring – this was Tasmanian MYRTLE (furniture timber). I got barely enough for my lounge room and some hardwood. Later on, I got some more for the rest of the rooms. I was glad with the Tasmanian Myrtle floor because it was what one called "matched end" so there is no wasted timber at all.

Another thing did happen – I would like to tell you about it. I was working in the city one day when I met another Dutch man. He seems to me a nice fellow and I asked him something about building a verandah. For this I needed some 2½ inch pipe. "Oh" he said, "being a foreman I got some pipes here so if you like, you can take them", possibly thinking that I had a car but I did not have one.



I needed pipe. I said "Thankyou" and took one on my shoulder and walked right through the city with that pipe which was long, it was 4 or 4 ½ metres. At the station, I found my way to the guard on the train for Eltham. From the top right corner to the left bottom corner measured this pipe. The guard had to step over the pipe before he could open the door and wave with his green flag (to the train driver in the first carriage) in the front.

The things one does when building his home! That was in 1953 but I think this would not be possible nowadays any more. I think the police would stop you. Thinking only on the weight, I would not be able to do this again.



### ELTHAM, ENGLAND

During her trip to England in June Gabrielle Turner continued our Society's long-standing contact with The Eltham Society. Jim Connor had compiled a DVD highlighting features of our Eltham and this was presented by Gabrielle to members of The Eltham Society. Gabrielle has returned with a number of publications on the English Eltham which are available for perusal by members. They include several publications on the important children's author Edith Nesbit who lived at Well Hall, Eltham in the early 1900s.

These papers and booklets will be available at our September meeting.

Since Gabrielle's visit we have received the sad news of the passing on 10<sup>th</sup> July of Clifford Crate, former Chairman of The Eltham Society. Clifford was well known to some of our members who had visited him in England and to many more who met him when he visited our Eltham with Margaret Taylor. Our condolences have been passed on to his dear friend Margaret and his family.

Clifford was 91 years of age at the time of his death.

### MORE NEWS

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

Mondays - 9.30am : 21<sup>st</sup> September, 19<sup>th</sup> October

Tuesdays - 7.30pm : 1<sup>st</sup> September, 6<sup>th</sup> October

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

The July heritage walk at Lower Plenty was most successful. The comprehensive notes produced by Anne Paul greatly contributed to this success. Anne intends to make some additions to the notes which would then be available as a self guided walk.

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