

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

No. A0016285F

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NEWSLETTER

NO. 196 JANUARY 2011

NEXT MEETING

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 9th FEBRUARY

"CELEBRATING PETER BASSETT-SMITH"

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE

LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM

(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)



Peter Bassett- Smith filming in Arnhem Land

FEBRUARY MEETING – CELEBRATING PETER BASSETT-SMITH

Distinguished life member of our Society, Peter Bassett-Smith, celebrated his 100th birthday on 25th January 2011 with a gathering at his home, "Birrarung", Kangaroo Ground. Society members were present to celebrate and wish Peter well on this memorable occasion.

As a further celebration of Peter's centenary, this will be the subject of our February meeting. The main agenda item will be a selection of films taken by Peter as part of a career and interest in movie photography spanning many decades. They include local subjects and events as well as some from other areas.



Peter is a founding member of our Society, having attended the public meeting in 1967 that decided to establish the Shire of Eltham Historical Society. Following the retirement of founding President Charis Pelling in 1976, Peter became President, a position that he held for four years. He is an Honorary Life Member and in 2010 was awarded the title of Distinguished Life Member in recognition of many years of outstanding contribution to the Society.

Peter was born in 1911 in Argentina but his parents returned to England with the approach of World War 1. They later migrated to Australia. Peter came to Eltham in 1928 when his parents built a house in York Street.

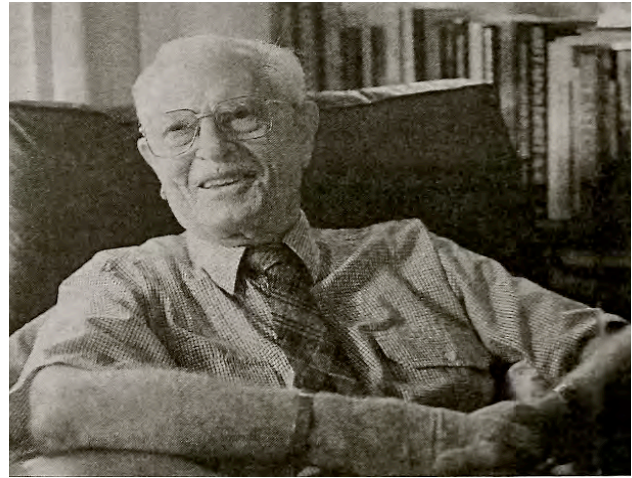


The former Bassett-Smith house in York Street, Eltham with the 1932 addition
Photograph by Peter Bassett-Smith c 1933

An early involvement in community activities was teaching Sunday School at St Margaret's Church. After some time spent in England he returned to Eltham and in 1939 enlisted in the Australian Army. He served overseas and later at the Royal Australian Signals Headquarters. After the war he spent time in Arnhem Land as a movie photographer for National Geographic, the Smithsonian Institute and the Commonwealth Department of Information. He was also Honorary Photographer for two Australian visits of Queen Elizabeth and for Prince Phillip for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.

After his marriage to Diana in 1951 they lived at Peter Street, Eltham. Peter often tells the story that the street was not named for him but for Peter Handfield, son of the family that subdivided this part of Eltham. At this time Peter became involved with the Eltham War Memorial Trust and the Youth Club. Later Peter and Diana moved to Kangaroo Ground where they still live on a smaller section of their original larger farm.

Peter has been involved with many community organisations over the years. In recognition of some thirty years service with the Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade he has been made an Honorary Life Member of the Brigade and also of the Country Fire Authority at a state level. He is also an Honorary Life Member of the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club. Other organisations, to which he has contributed on a volunteer basis include the War Memorial Tower at Kangaroo Ground, the Andrew Ross Museum, and Warrandyte State Park. For many years he served as a Justice of the Peace.



In recognition of a lifetime of community work Peter was named Nillumbik Citizen of the Year in 2001.

Peter has been a great contributor to our Society over many years. While failing vision and the health issues associated with ageing have now restricted active involvement, Peter still enjoys attending our meetings. Diana continues as a Committee Member and thereby provides an active link with Peter's lifetime experiences (as well as her own).

This meeting will provide a rare opportunity to view some of Peter's work of many years by way of his films.

JOCK READ 1915 - 2010

Francis Percival Read, better known to Society members as Jock passed away on 22nd December 2010. Jock was an Honorary Life Member of the Society and in 2010 was granted the title of Distinguished Life Member for his outstanding contribution over many years. A large number of members attended his funeral service at St Margaret's Church on 7th January.

Jock's story appeared in Newsletter No 194 as an edited version of interview tapes. The brief biography below is based on those interviews and other sources.

Jock was born in 1915, his parents came from the United Kingdom – his grandfather from London and his grandmother from Scotland. When Jock was about 4 – during WW1 – his family used to come out to Eltham to stay with two aunties and the family later moved to Eltham in about 1920 to live permanently. Jock first went to the Dalton Street Primary School then to the Higher Elementary School (now Eltham High School) when it opened in 1928. He left school in 1930 when he was 14 years old.

At a young age he worked on various orchards in the area, spent time wood cutting as well as milking cows and doing odd jobs. He also worked with heavy horses, learnt how to plough and break in horses. During his childhood Jock had many adventures, including exploring and camping around the local area. He was a choirboy and an altar boy at St. Margaret's Church and also went to cubs and scouts there.

In 1932 during the depression he started a mail run for people around the Eltham area and had about 30 customers who he charged one shilling per week. Jock used to go to the Post Office to pick up letters, deliver them to the people, then collect their mail and take it back to the Post Office.

In about 1934 he joined the Navy cadets and then later went into the Naval Reserves. During the Second World War Jock served in the Navy on a number of Adelaide Steamship passenger liners that were converted to armed merchant cruisers. During his service he was a seaman gunner and considered himself lucky that he was never wounded.



He served around Australia, Darwin, New Guinea, Singapore, Java and the Indies and then all around Borneo and the Philippines. Jock had a twin brother who was also in the Navy and one younger brother. At one stage during the war he served on the same ship as his twin brother.

After the war he was in and out of hospital and then joined the Corps of Commissionaires in 1955. The Corps was formed in 1946 for ex-servicemen who could not do heavy jobs. Jock was employed in various roles at an Architects firm – Stevenson and Turner, where he stayed for 20 years. When he turned 60 he told them: *“I have had enough and that if I carried on much more I might not last.”* *“But I have”* he commented in the interview.

Jock was a well recognised and much loved figure around Eltham in his later years, including when he rode his horse leading many Eltham parades and ANZAC Day marches. After his retirement from full time employment he worked as a school-crossing supervisor at local schools for about 20 years and children during that time will remember Jock, who often had his horse with him. He was involved in various community activities for many years, including with the Eltham RSL, Legacy and our Society. Jock had a remarkable and detailed memory about his life experiences, especially his early days in Eltham and he will be sadly missed by generations of Eltham people.

OPAL SMITH 1914 – 2010

Opal Smith, who died on 1st November 2010, had been a member of our Society for thirty-one years. She was Treasurer and Membership Secretary for six years and was an Honorary Life Member of the Society.



Opal participated in many of our Society's floats in the Eltham Festival parade in the 1980's. The photograph on the right shows her with other members displaying the award for our float in the 1989 parade.

Opal was born in Carlton but, as a child, lived in many locations in Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland.

She returned to Melbourne at the age of eighteen and four years later married Ken Smith who she had known before moving interstate. They built a house at the corner of Main Road and Grand Boulevard, Montmorency, then part of the newly subdivided Panorama Heights Estate. The area developed slowly and for many years they had few nearby neighbours.

Ken and Opal operated a cartage business with one old truck. Significantly, they carted much of the second-hand building material for Montsalvat. The business transformed into the supply of firewood operating from a yard adjacent to the house. They purchased a farm in Buttermans Track, St Andrews as a source of firewood.

Ken died in 1957 at the age of 43, leaving Opal with two teenage sons and the task of managing the family business. She started farming the St Andrews property, sold the firewood business to Ken's brother and leased out part of the wood yard site for a service station.

In 1979 she moved to a new house further along Grand Boulevard where she lived for the rest of her life. Now, being free of business constraints, Opal entered a different phase of her life, devoting time to overseas travel, community organisations and a range of cultural and physical activities.

Opal will be missed by her friends in the Society and in her many other spheres of interest.

2011 PROGRAM

Attached to this Newsletter is the Society's program for this year. It is also available on the Society's website and extra copies are available if required.

It includes topics and speakers for each meeting as well as dates for other activities, Committee meetings, records workshops, heritage excursions and other excursions. Any changes through the year will be notified in the Newsletter.

A growing group of members continue to make progress with getting our records into systematic order but there remains much work to be done. Members are encouraged to come along to our records workshops to assist with this task. They are held on the first Tuesday (evenings) and third Monday (mornings) of most months. Dates are listed in the program with the 2011 workshops commencing from 1st February.

OTHER NEWS

The Society's computer equipment has recently been significantly upgraded with technical assistance from Wal Delaney, which is most appreciated. It has been made possible by a grant of \$600 from the Eltham Rural Group and we are most grateful to them for this financial assistance. There have also been significant additions to our storage equipment with second hand shelving, filing cabinets and plan drawers having been received from Nillumbik Council and other organisations.

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The Society has transferred its accounts to the recently opened Eltham branch of the Bendigo Bank. This bank is a significant supporter of local organisations in areas where it has a branch. Even before the Eltham branch opened our Society was able to facilitate a grant from the bank for Marguerite Marshall's book "Nillumbik Now and Then".

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Our Society will host meetings of the combined Nillumbik Heritage Groups on 10th February and the Eastern Region of Historical Societies on 26th February.

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There was a very good attendance at our Christmas function, so much so that we will consider a larger venue than the rear room of the Courthouse for future events of this type. At this function there was a short presentation honouring Joh Ebeli. Joh has been a member for many years but cannot regularly attend meetings due to art teaching commitments. He has provided great assistance to the Society over many years with artwork, preparation of parade floats and the like.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

To satisfy the requirements of the Society's rules, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Eltham District Historical Society Incorporated will be held at 8.00pm on Wednesday 9th March 2011 at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre.

The agenda of the Annual General Meeting is set out below in accordance with the rules. Further details will be given in the March Newsletter.

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2010 Annual General Meeting
3. Reports
 - a. President's Report
 - b. Treasurer's Report
 - c. Any other reports
4. Election of office bearers and ordinary members of committee positions to be filled as follows:

President
Senior Vice President
Junior Vice President
Secretary
Treasurer/Membership Secretary
Ordinary Committee Members (not less than three and not more than six)

5. Fixing of entrance fee (if any) and annual subscription
6. Any other business of which at least two weeks notice has been given to members.

It should be noted that under the Society's rules nominations of office bearers should be made in writing to the Secretary not less than seven days before the meeting.

Nominations should be signed by two members of the Society and accompanied by the written consent of the candidate. If insufficient nominations are received further nominations shall be received at the meeting. However, it should be noted that where a valid prior nomination is received it will have priority and no nomination for that position can be accepted at the meeting.

Each year we urge members to contribute to the running of our Society by becoming an office bearer or committee member and we have the same message again this year. Please give the matter some consideration and, if in doubt, discuss it with one of our office bearers. The workload is not great. There are usually just six committee meetings each year, alternating with our general meetings. We warmly welcome fresh ideas to help us run a vibrant organisation and increase our membership.

Jim Connor
President

Russell Yeoman
Secretary

David Johns
Treasurer /
Membership Secretary
Phone - 9434 3357

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