

ELTHAM DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Incorporated

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NEWSLETTER

NO. 201 NOVEMBER 2011

NEXT MEETING

8-00 PM WEDNESDAY 9th NOVEMBER

SPEAKER MIKE RIDLEY

"MONTSALVAT REVISITED"

ELTHAM SENIOR CITIZENS' CENTRE

LIBRARY PLACE ELTHAM

(FORMERLY OLD SHIRE OFFICE DRIVEWAY)

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### **CHRISTMAS FUNCTION**

**6.30 PM WEDNESDAY 14<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER**

**REAR ANNEXE - OLD ELTHAM COURTHOUSE 730 MAIN ROAD**

### **HERITAGE EXCURSIONS PROGRAM**

**2PM SATURDAY**

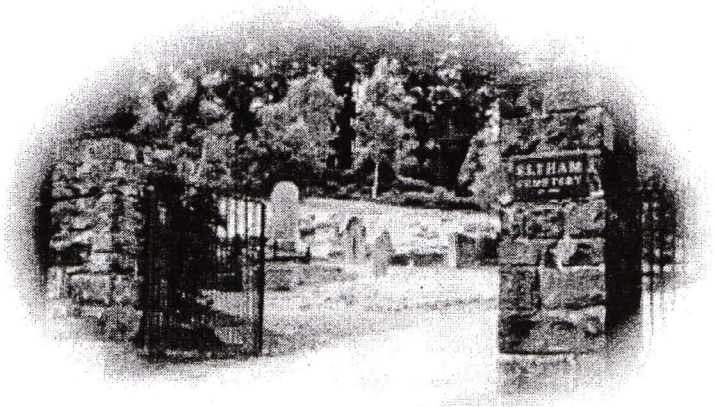
**5<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER**

**LOWER PLENTY RIVER RED  
GUM WALK**

**2PM SUNDAY**

**13<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER**

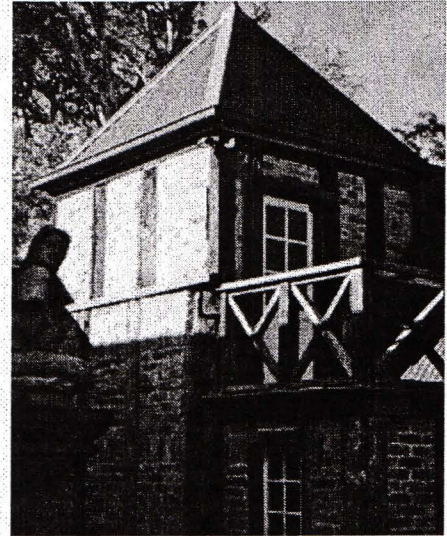
**ELTHAM CEMETERY VISIT**



## **NOVEMBER MEETING**

At our meeting last November we were fortunate to have Mike Ridley, who is a member of our Society, present a most interesting talk on the history of Montsalvat and the many people who have contributed to the development of this landmark complex. As Mike is a volunteer tour guide at Montsalvat he has accumulated a wealth of knowledge about the place and its people.

The evening was such an enjoyable journey through our local history that it left many of us wanting more. Mike has therefore kindly agreed to a return visit to entertain us with his "Montsalvat Revisited" presentation, concentrating on the characters that have shaped Montsalvat, not only as the Colony was developing but also some years before, to put the history in context. This time he will be talking about the characters and their lives - rather than buildings.



## **LOWER PLENTY RIVER RED GUM WALK**

The predominant feature of this walk in the Bonds Road area, Lower Plenty is the large number of magnificent old River Red Gums that line the route. The walk also includes parts of the historic Cleveland Estate and Henry Stooke's "Rosehill" homestead as described in the separate historical article in this Newsletter. From the southern part of Cleveland Avenue there are extensive views across and along the Yarra Valley.

This walk will start at 2pm on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November at the corner of Bonds Road and Stawell Road (Melway Ref. 33 B1). It is about 3 km. in length and will take about two hours. Parking is available in Montpelier Drive.

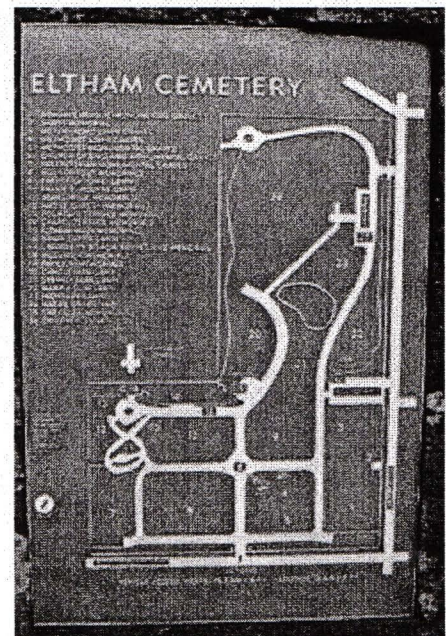
This free walk is open to Society members and the general public. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.

## **ELTHAM CEMETERY VISIT**

The Eltham Cemetery is the custodian of more than 150 years of Eltham's history. Harry Gilham's research on the cemetery includes information on Eltham pioneers from those early years, as well as details of interesting and important locals buried there in more recent times.

Harry will lead a further tour of grave sites on Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November. It will include many sites not visited on previous cemetery visits. The tour will start at 2.00 pm.

Enter the cemetery from Mt Pleasant Road (Melway Ref. 21 K9) and proceed to the car park near the south - western corner. This tour is free and is open to the general public as well as Society members.

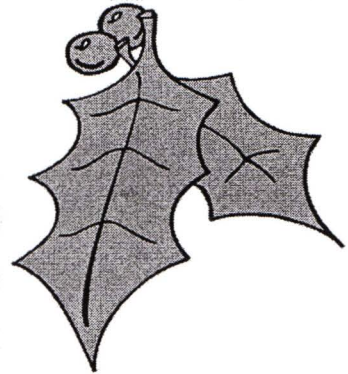


## **CHRISTMAS FUNCTION**

The format for our Christmas function on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December will be the same as for the last few years. We will be using the rear annexe at the old Eltham Courthouse and will commence at 6.30pm. There is no formal agenda item but Jim Connor has agreed to again provide a background screening of local historical photos and pictures from his own collection. The Local History Centre collection will be available for browsing. For convenience we may bring some of the displays into the Courthouse.

The Society will supply meat and cheese platters and desserts. Members are asked to bring a salad to share and any other items, such as nibbles, that they would like to contribute. Ring Sue on 9439 9520 if in doubt about what to bring. Wine and soft drink will be available and, of course, there will be coffee and tea. Bring along any other types of drinks that you think you will need.

Limited parking is available in the back yard of the Local History Centre. There is plenty of parking on the wide verge on the west side of Main Road, but there are some issues in getting across the traffic at this time of day. Otherwise, you can park in Brougham Street.



## **200 NEWSLETTERS - MORE TO COME**

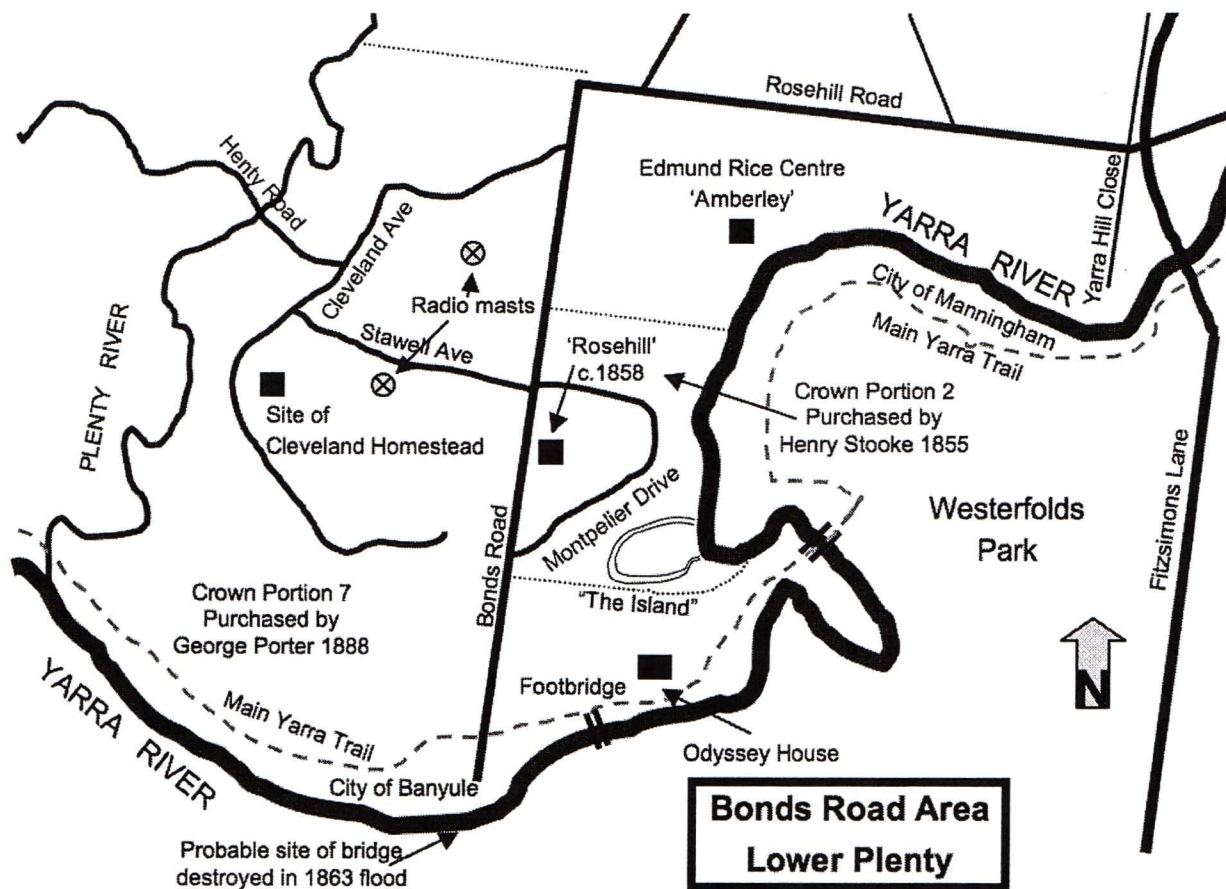
At the September meeting the occasion of our 200<sup>th</sup> Newsletter was recognised by an award to Russell Yeoman for his involvement in the production of the Newsletter since its inception in 1978. The Award consisted of a commemorative plate produced by local potters Chris and Mary-Lou Pittard, a framed copy of the Newsletter and a large decorated cake for supper.

It is important to recognise that production of our Newsletter is a team effort. For many years now it has been typed by Sue Law and in recent years Jim Connor has been involved in the inclusion of photographs and other artwork, Harry Gilham produces copies at the office of local MP Steve Herbert and distribution is the task of Gwen and Doug Orford. This teamwork is critical not just for the production of the Newsletter but for all other aspects of the Society's activities.

For the 200<sup>th</sup> edition we included a selection of articles from earlier Newsletters. From time to time we will continue this theme in future editions. For this issue we have included the following article from an earlier newsletter.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE BONDS ROAD AREA, LOWER PLENTY**

This article first appeared in Newsletter No. 3, September 1978. Since that time there have been some significant changes in the area, including low-density residential subdivision and changes to some of the non-residential land uses. As a result of municipal restructuring, this area that was previously the south - western corner of the Shire of Eltham is now included within the City of Banyule. The article has been amended to include recent changes and some improved knowledge of earlier history, but apart from these changes, it has been repeated in the words of the 1978 article.



It is often difficult to establish firm boundaries for the area of an historical study. In this case we have the natural boundaries of the Yarra and Plenty Rivers, together with the cadastral boundary of Rosehill Road in the north. The rivers bound a peninsula of land, which was the south - western corner of the Shire of Eltham and a self contained geographical unit. Together with the area extending easterly between Rosehill Road and the Yarra River it also forms a fairly well contained historical unit.

The history of any area is the story of the land, its resources, its people and its development. Because it came first, we should commence the story with the land. For the geologically minded the area comprises siltstone and sandstone deposits of Silurian age on the higher levels, whilst the river flats are geologically recent alluvial deposits.

The terrain varies from extensive river flats along the western and southern sides of the peninsula to higher land sloping steeply down to the river in the east and in the Rosehill Road area. The hilltops command extensive views along the Yarra Valley. Except for the immediate river environs the land has been cleared. The only evidence of the former vegetation that remains is the old River Red Gums, which are scattered throughout the area. These trees are of the spreading woodland form of this species indicating that they must have been originally growing in a reasonably open setting.

Along the river some uncleared land remains providing important fauna habitats. Remnants of this riparian vegetation system occur on the slopes below Rosehill Road and at "The Island". This latter feature is a bend in the Yarra that was believed to have been cut off by a new channel formed by a flood in the 1890s. This channel, now forming the main course of the river, certainly did not appear on Surveyor William Wedge Darke's original plan of the river produced in 1837.

Prior to white settlement this area was the territory of the Wurundjeri people. The 1978 article stated that little had been recorded of their activities. Since that time Aboriginal heritage studies and a number of reports and publications have provided a much greater knowledge of this subject. This area at the junction of two major watercourses was an important gathering place for the indigenous people. However, dealing with that aspect is beyond the scope of this article.

The earliest recorded settler in the area was Edward Willis who had a pastoral run at the junction of the Plenty and Yarra Rivers prior to 1837. As was the case with many of the lands occupied by squatters of this period the boundaries are unrecorded. A visitor to the area in 1837 recorded that Willis was living in a tent, but he later built a house some distance to the north near the present Main Road bridge over the Plenty.

Willis's occupation of at least part of his run was short lived. The first land sales in the Parish of Keelbundora were held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1838. The land sold comprised the present Heidelberg and extended across the Plenty River to what is now the line of Bonds Road. Portion 7 was the land which straddled the Plenty and this was bought by George Porter. It totalled 780 acres of which about 480 acres were in what was to become the Shire of Eltham. This was the first land purchased within that Shire.

George Porter (1800-1848) came to Sydney in 1835, having some years earlier left his native Yorkshire to live in Malaya. He brought with him a wife, six children and a large quantity of goods with which to establish himself as a merchant. By 1839 Porter had moved to the Port Phillip District and had established two addresses, one being his house in Melbourne and the other one on his Lower Plenty property. Both were named "Cleveland" after his former home in the Cleveland Hills, Yorkshire. Following Porter's death the property appears to have been handled by two of his sons, John and George Junior.

The Lower Plenty "Cleveland" was apparently occupied only spasmodically by the Porter family and this property was split up into 3 or 4 farms occupied by tenant farmers. In 1863 the tenant of the land on the Eltham side of the Plenty was Thomas Mundy, who had won many prizes for ploughing and was considered the best ploughman in Victoria. A tenant on the Heidelberg side was Joseph Bond whose family later figured prominently in the history of the Lower Plenty area.

The land to the east of Porter's purchase was not sold by the Government until 1855. In that year the land between Bonds and Rosehill Roads and the Yarra River was sold in 5 allotments ranging from 44 to 109 acres, and comprising Section 1A of the Parish of Nillumbik. Purchasers were S. Wekey, Henry Stooke, R. Moody and J. Foxton who bought two allotments. Wekey's land adjoined Bolton Street (now Yarra Hill Close), which was the western boundary of the Eltham Village Reserve. Few details are known of any of these purchasers excepting Henry Stooke who bought Allotment 2 of some 80 acres. He had previously purchased land at Eltham and went on to serve for many years as Chairman of the Eltham District Road Board. In about 1858 he built the house "Rosehill" on his Lower Plenty land. This house remains substantially unaltered and has been classified by the National Trust.

By 1863 the peninsula we are considering had become a well established farming area with a bridge across the Yarra at the end of Bonds Road connecting it with Templestowe. In December of that year there occurred the worst floods recorded on the Yarra and it is

said that the river rose 50 feet above its normal level. The bridge was washed away and the farmers of the area faced huge losses. Thomas Mundy lost 7000 pounds, his crop of 70 acres of potatoes being destroyed.

The Porter family repossessed some of the farms of their tenants, although apparently in Mundy's case, they agreed to forgo the rent and to supply seed for the next season.



Rosehill homestead c1968

The bridge was not replaced and the area remained isolated from through traffic and relatively unchanged for many years. Early in the twentieth century the Bond family purchased "Rosehill" from Henry Stooke's descendants. The Bonds also bought other land in the area between Rosehill Road and the river. The family owned the "Rosehill" property until 1958.

In 1924 the Cleveland Estate was subdivided into 71 lots by the Porter family. The lots ranged in size from 5 to 76 acres and included land on both the Eltham and Heidelberg sides of the Plenty. The subdivision created the present roads, Cleveland Avenue, Stawell Road and Henty Road. The bridge over the Plenty in Henty Road was apparently built about this time although, obviously, the Porters had some crossing prior to this. The plan produced for the 1924 land sale shows the "original homestead" on a site in Cleveland Avenue. This house is now demolished and it is not known whether it was the house built by George Porter in the 1830s.

The character of the area is now one of small rural residential holdings, although there is a significant proportion of non-residential use and to the east of Bonds Road, much of the land has been subdivided into lots of 0.4ha. (1 acre) for residential purposes. This subdivision includes the former Stooke property, which was subdivided in the 1960s into residential lots based on Montpelier Drive and with "Rosehill" remaining on one of the lots.

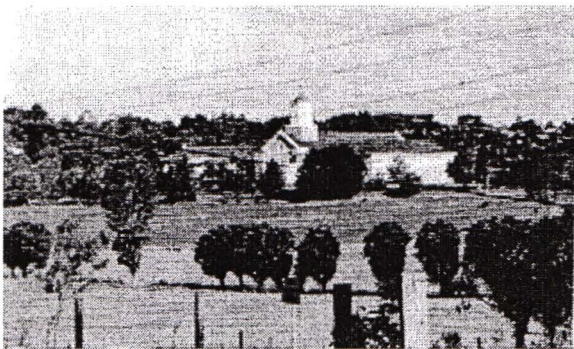
In 1978 land to both the north and south of the former Stooke land was owned by branches of the Roman Catholic Church. To the north the "Amberley" property was operating as a Christian Brothers training centre. "Amberley" was a private mansion built in 1929-30 for Oswald Wallwyn Darch. It has been significantly extended and new

buildings added. Most of the property has now been subdivided for residential development. The building complex operates as the Edmund Rice Centre "Amberley", a retreat, conference and spirituality centre.



Amberley c1992 – photograph by David Bick from Shire of Eltham Heritage Study

To the south the Seminary of the Blessed Sacrament Fathers dominates the river flats. This building was constructed in three stages during the 1950s. A suspension footbridge was constructed across the Yarra to allow priests easier access to Melbourne and to allow residents of Templestowe to attend services at the Seminary.



Odyssey House C1992

This building now houses Odyssey House Drug Rehabilitation Centre. Most of the former seminary property is now included in the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park.

*Odyssey House photographs by David Bick from the Shire of Eltham Heritage Study*



Odyssey House suspension bridge c1992

There have also been changes to land use within the Cleveland Estate. North of Cleveland Avenue the former M.M.B.W. Purification Plant has been demolished and this site was subdivided for residential development in the 1990s. In the south of this estate a large area has been incorporated into the Metropolitan Park. The Main Yarra Trail connecting Melbourne with Templestowe passes through this area. It enters this area across a bridge over the Plenty River near its junction with the Yarra. This path proceeds easterly from Bonds Road and crosses into Westerfolds Park by a further bridge across the Yarra.

Along the Plenty River is the Rosanna Golf Club, which occupies part of the Cleveland Estate and extends west of the river.

Another type of use for which this area is apparently ideal is AM radio transmission. Several major radio stations have established tall aerial masts on the higher land near Stawell Road. These red and white masts form a major feature of the landscape of the area.

Along Rosehill Road there were a number of semi-rural properties with substantial houses built on the ridge overlooking the Yarra, including the former Nicholas house "Yarrowie" at the eastern end of Rosehill Road. Most of these properties have now been subdivided into low-density residential lots. The original houses remain within this altered setting.

The 1978 article concluded:

"The area which we have studied is one which is rich in detailed local history. The proposals for the future of the area are such that the remaining visible components of this history, including the landscape of the river valleys are likely to be retained in a recognisable form and not be submerged in the tide of suburbia. It is considered that from an historical viewpoint these proposals are quite appropriate."

These proposals have now been implemented in the form of establishment of this part of the Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park and the firming up of planning controls. These controls under the Banyule Planning Scheme include Heritage Overlays for "Rosehill", "Amberley", Odyssey House and "Yarrowie" and significant protection for the landscape and environment.

#### References quoted in 1978

1. Marshall Alan           Pioneers and Painters. Nelson 1971
2. Garden D. S.           Heidelberg, The Land and its People 1838-1900. M.U.P. 1972
3. Wilkinson David J.   The Early History of Diamond Valley 1836-1854. M.A. Thesis, Melbourne University, 1969
4. Scott & Furphy Engineers Pty. Ltd. Yarra Valley Metropolitan Park. A Recreational, Conservation and Landscape Planning Study. 1977
5. Hawley G. and McKinlay B. Diamond Valley Sketchbook, Rigby 1973

(There is a significantly greater amount of reference sources, including Heritage Studies for the Shire of Eltham and City of Banyule)



## GRANT FROM THE BENDIGO BANK

As mentioned in our last newsletter, the Eltham District Historical Society has recently been fortunate in receiving a grant of \$1800 from the Eltham branch of the Bendigo Bank, which along with other local Bendigo Bank branches, is operated by Valley Community Financial Services (Ltd).

We appreciate this generous support as it will enable our society to expand our capabilities, through the introduction of improved public address systems to benefit our members, as well as increase the involvement of visitors and school students who attend our activities. It has also contributed towards the purchase of equipment to enable the recording of important oral histories from our members and others. As we are a volunteer operated not-for-profit group, with a limited financial base, this grant will assist us to noticeably improve the provision of our services.



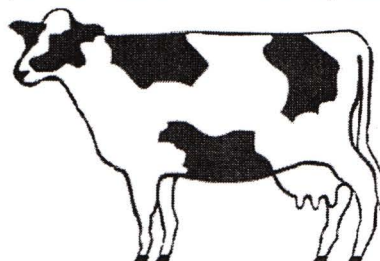
Members of our committee were presented with the cheque as part of an enjoyable Community Support Presentation Night held by the Bendigo Bank in Hurstbridge on 29 September 2011.

## FROM OUR NEWSPAPER FILES *contributed by Harry Gilham*

In the 1902 and 1904 'Evelyn Observer', the local newspaper of the Shire of Eltham, there was a column named 'Wedding Bells'. Along with the names of the couples, their parents, the Church, the names of people connected to the Bride and Groom the report of the presents at the after service gatherings were listed as to who gave what from their side of the families.

The following items have been listed in the two weddings of Miss Florence Maud Knapman (1902) and Miss Catherine Emma Gilsenan (1904):

A kitchen stove, piano, set of jugs, pair of primrose vases, ruby vases, canary in a cage, teapot, crumb tray and brush, apron, supper cloth, marble clock, fruit dishes, picture frames, pair of mats, hanging brush rack, serviettes, pair of d'oyleys, cheques, pair of hall curtains, candle sticks, cow in full milk, pair of pickle jars, set of afternoon tea spoons, dinner set, cheese cover, drawing room lamp, silver marmalade dish, jardiniere, glass cream jug and basin, water jug and glasses, silver mounted biscuit barrel, glass fruit stand and tray cloth, picture of local scenery, silver bread fork and butter knife, serviette rings, cedar table, along with household linen and items of 'handsome and costly' presents of a personal nature.



## AND ALSO

In 1985 the Society constructed a monument to commemorate Victoria's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in the grounds of the Eltham Community and Reception Centre. Beneath the monument is a time capsule to be opened in 2035. The monument has been damaged but the damaged parts were salvaged and it has now been repaired by Carter Art of Research. We are grateful to Nillumbik Shire Council for its assistance with the repair work.

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Our regular Records Workshops continue to attract a good number of members but more are always welcome. At recent workshops we have been allocating specific projects to individual members with the idea that they can follow through with the one continuous project each time that they come. Examples are typing of handwritten family histories and co-ordination of photos from the Society's collection with those at the Eltham Library. Workshop dates for the rest of this year are :

Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November - 9.30am  
Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> December - 7.30pm

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November is Local History Month at Yarra Plenty Regional Libraries. Talks and other events will be held at all branches of the Library throughout the month. Details are available on the Library website. Events at Eltham Library include a presentation by Jim Connor "Eltham Then and Now", 6pm Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> November and on Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> November 10.30am, St Margarets celebrates 150 years. Also of interest is a talk on Kinglake history at Mill Park Library on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2pm.

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Subscriptions for 2011/12 were due on 1<sup>st</sup> July but unfortunately some members have not paid yet. The Society does not have large cash reserves so it is important that subscriptions, which are our main source of income, are paid promptly if we are to continue to service our members. Outstanding payments would be appreciated, or your advice if you no longer wish to receive the Newsletter.

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Each year Nillumbik Shire Council provides financial support to each of the nine historical societies and heritage groups operating within the Shire by way of a Heritage Grant. We have received a grant of \$500 for the 2011-12 financial year, which will be applied towards the operating costs of our Local History Centre. We are grateful to the Council for its support.

*The Eltham District Historical Society  
appreciates the financial support provided by the  
Eltham and District branch of the Bendigo Bank*

Eltham and District  
**Community Bank®** Branch

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