

Newsletter

No. 217 July 2014



Fabbro Fields

In early 2010, the State Government purchased the 4.87 hectare property at 2 Bell Street, Eltham that abuts the Diamond Creek and is opposite the Eltham High School. Nillumbik Shire Council was appointed as Committee of Management in August 2011 for this land, which was part of the former farm and market garden holdings used by the Fabbro family from the early 1930s.

The Eltham District Historical Society subsequently requested that Council consider using the name 'Fabbro Fields' for the property to *'commemorate the long history and active farming involvement of the Fabbro family on the extensive tracts of farmland along the western side of the Diamond Creek in Eltham'*.

As part of our strong support for this naming we advised Council we considered the property to be historically important as an example of the former market gardens that were once common along the waterways of the district. Research indicates that the property was used for market gardening purposes from the 1860s until 2007.



Former Fabbro family home - Falkiner Street Eltham

Following discussions with remaining family members and with a number of community members involved in the Bell Street project Council resolved to support the naming of the property as 'Fabbro Fields.' Approval to formally use this name then needed to be sought under the Geographic Place Names Act 1998 from the Registrar of Geographic Names.

Nillumbik Shire Council has just advised that this approval has been received and 2 Bell Street is now formally confirmed as 'Fabbro Fields'.

The Eltham District Historical Society appreciates the support received in response to our request to establish this name, particularly from Nillumbik Shire Council councillors and officers.

The name 'Fabbro Fields' is now a permanent and appropriate recognition of the Fabbro family's extensive contribution to the small farm history of early Eltham.



Fabbro Fields sign at 2 Bell Street Eltham

Next Meeting

8.00 PM Wednesday 9th July 2014
Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre
Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)

Heritage Excursion

Walter Withers drive yourself excursion
2.00 PM Saturday 5th July 2014
See further details on page 2

July Meeting

Montmorency- The farm on the Plenty

Why is there a windmill in Were Street? Who were the first people on the land? Where was the original homestead and where did Sherbourne Road get its name?

Greensborough and Eltham became towns in the 19th century but it was not until the 20th century that Montmorency began to take on the characteristics that we now associate with the area.



The Davey family of Plenty Farm
- Photo courtesy of Silvia Tupper

Maureen Jones has a degree in Social Work from Latrobe University and for many years has combined her interest in people and social conditions with her love of local history. She moved to the area in 1960, first to Briar Hill then Lower Plenty and to her present home in Montmorency in 1980. She spent twenty years in South Gippsland combining a farming enterprise with off farm work in local government and state government positions as a Social Worker. She returned to live in Montmorency seven years ago and is now a committee member of the Eltham District Historical Society with a special interest in the history of Montmorency. Maureen is the author of four books: Mountain Scrub and Plain-History of St. Joseph's parish Foster (2000), Naming the Women - Mary Morgan's story (2009), Journey to Taatooke - Emily Gavan's story (2010) and Wool on the Water - Theisz family pioneers (2014).

Maureen Jones has been researching Montmorency for five years and will share some of Montmorency's fascinating history at our July meeting at 8.00pm on Wednesday 9th July 2014. We hope you can come and share this with us and join in the discussion about this unique suburb. New members and visitors are most welcome at all of our meetings.

July Excursion

Our July excursion will depart from the usual format in that it will be a Walter Withers drive yourself excursion rather than a guided walk. Some of the stops will involve a short walk. Car sharing can be arranged for those wishing to do it that way.

Heidelberg School artist Walther Withers lived in Eltham from 1903 until his death on 13th October 1914. This excursion is part of our commemoration of the centenary of his death. In addition our September meeting will feature a talk on Walter Withers by noted art historian Andrew Mackenzie.



Walter Withers in his studio at 'Southernwood', Eltham

The excursion will visit a number of Eltham sites on the Heidelberg School Artist's Trail featuring Withers paintings. We will also view the Withers memorial plaque in Bible Street that was installed as the Society's Australian bi-centennial project. The Withers family home 'Southernwood' remains today as a well preserved private home. We will stop to view it from the street. The final stop will be the graveyard at St Katherine's Church, St Helena where Walter Withers is buried, together with his daughter Mary.

The excursion will start at the Eltham Library (Melway ref. 21 J5) at 2.00pm on Saturday 5th July. It will take 2 to 2.5 hours. This free excursion is open to the general public as well as Society members. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.

The Society recently received an email from Christopher Wallis, a resident of Germany, enquiring about Benjamin Oliver Wallis. An early member of his family, Benjamin Wallis, migrated to Australia from Newlyn, Cornwall in the 1850s and became a prominent resident of Eltham for the second half of the 19th Century. Investigations by Harry Gilham resulted in a reply confirming the Eltham Wallis was in fact the subject of the enquiry.

Information for this article has been obtained from Society records, the Shire of Eltham Heritage Study (David Bick and others), a History of St Margaret's Anglican Church, Eltham (Geoffrey A Sandy) and railway construction plans from the late 1800s. They show that Wallis was a publican, an active member of St Margaret's, a significant landowner within Holloway's 'Little Eltham' subdivision and a councillor of the Shire of Eltham. St Margaret's records referred to in Geoff Sandy's book show that Wallis was associated with the Church for a long period from the 1860s, including briefly on the Parsonage Committee. Many Church meetings were held in the Eltham Hotel where he was the publican. He also provided refreshments for tea meetings and the like.

In 1867 Wallis purchased the property at 739 Main Road, Eltham, now the Living and Learning Nillumbik Centre. It had previously been owned by tanner John A Pearson and contained the tannery at the rear adjoining the Diamond Creek. This property was to be the Wallis home for nearly 30 years. During the period 1875-1889 Benjamin's son Richard was the owner. Richard, also a publican, died in 1889 and ownership reverted to Benjamin.

Fountain Hotel

Eltham Hotel

Wallis House

Eltham Courthouse



Detail from
a sketch in
'The Illustrated
Australian News'
December 26 1884

Wallis also owned land in Brougham and Franklin Streets and another parcel around Silver Street. The railway plans show that the Silver Street land was occupied by E. Falkiner, presumably Evelyn Falkiner, a member of the well-known Eltham South farming family. Following Wallis' death in 1896 a list of his property holdings included a brick house at the corner of Brisbane and Silver Streets. This house survived until the 1980s and was well known as the home of Eltham identities Frank and Rosalie Downes. Benjamin Wallis was an Eltham Shire Councillor from 1880 to 1887. He is buried at the Eltham Cemetery along with his wife Anna and son Richard.

The research for this story has raised the question as to whether Benjamin Wallis owned the Eltham Hotel or Eltham's other hotel the Fountain (or Fountain of Friendship). St Margaret's records indicate that it was the Eltham Hotel but that is at odds with the information in the Bick study that has Christopher Watson owning it at a time when Wallis is clearly listed as publican. Other documents on our Society files seem to point to the Eltham Hotel as being correct but some questions remain unanswered. This story clearly requires some further research. Christopher Wallis has provided a number of family documents including family tree extracts, census data and marriage certificates that have been retained in our growing 'Wallis File'.

Fire

It is natural to think of history as an event that occurred some time ago, yet history is happening every day.....or at least there are current activities that at some future time will be seen as being of historical significance.

One such event occurred for the Eltham Fire Brigade on 19 May 2014 with the turning of the first sod at the site for a new fire station to be built at 735 Main Road and 61 Brougham Street Eltham. This site has access to Main Road and extends along Brougham Street to the Diamond Creek. This will replace the current station at 909 Main Road, on the southern edge of the Eltham Town Centre.

Since the 1920s the local Eltham community has been served by dedicated members of the Eltham Fire Brigade, which was first registered with the Country Fire Brigades Board on 1 July 1930. They have been involved in many major fires including those in 1939, 1962, 1965, 1969, Ash Wednesday 1983 and Black Saturday 2009, as well as attending significant building fires such as the Eltham Barrel and the Montsalvat Barn. At times they have even assisted in other states.



Eltham Fire Station c1960



Eltham Fire Station 2013

In 1966 the brigade moved from a smaller building on the opposite side of Main Road to their current station, which was renovated in 1987. During this time their vehicles and equipment have also changed significantly, from the 1960s Austin pumpers to their current fleet of four vehicles including their primary response unit, a large Scania pumper.

Local Bushfire History

In reviewing the several heritage studies that have been done for the Shire, Nillumbik Shire Council identified that the accompanying environmental histories contained little information about the history of bushfires in the area. With assistance of a Government grant the Council commissioned a report to cover this gap. The result was a comprehensive report entitled "A History of Bushfire in the Nillumbik Shire Area" written by historian Dr Peter Mills in conjunction with heritage consultant Samantha Westbrooke.

The report deals with the history of fire in the local area from pre-settlement times up to the Black Saturday Fires of 2009. It looks at the Aboriginal people's use of fire and also how settlers used fire as part of their land management. Major bushfires are covered in some detail as well as many lesser fires. An important aspect is the early establishment of local bushfires brigades leading to the far more sophisticated Country Fire Authority brigades of today. The report is very well referenced with sources of information. The Society has printed copies of the report available for members' reading or alternatively an electronic version can be emailed on request to edhsnews@gmail.com.

Facebook...well we regularly hear about it, but what is it?

It is generally described as a popular free social networking website on the internet that allows registered users to create profiles, upload photos and video, send messages and keep in touch with friends, family and colleagues.



Founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg with his college roommates and fellow Harvard University students it had 1.23 billion active users every month at the end of January 2014, while 945 million of this total were identified by the company on December 31, 2013 as mobile users. Users must register before using the site, after which they may create a personal profile, add other users as friends, exchange messages and receive automatic notifications when they update their profile.

Many community-based organisations or individuals now use Facebook as an effective and easily accessible method of communicating with those of shared interests and for displaying photographs or information. It has changed the way people can be involved in local history, as they can now obtain details and provide comments at various Facebook sites without necessarily making any connections with their local historical society.

Liz Pidgeon, the local and family librarian at the Yarra Plenty Regional Library Service has supplied details on the following Facebook sites that may be of interest:

Lost Melbourne

<https://www.facebook.com/LostMelbourne>

Greensborough and Surrounds Photo and History

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Greensborough-and-Surrounds-Photo-History-Site/361000787305310>
short URL - <http://buff.ly/1kKnlyj>

Bring back the Eltham Barrel

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/17905688815/>

Nillumbik Historical Society

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Nillumbik-Historical-Society-Inc/152508648141032>

I grew up in the Diamond Valley area

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/223942274423172/>

St Margaret's Anglican Church Eltham – posting photos of their building project

<https://www.facebook.com/stmargaretseltham>

Yarra Plenty Regional Library

<https://www.facebook.com/YarraPlentyRegionalLibrary>

Nillumbik Artists Open Studios

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/271408756221055/>

Black Saturday – Tree Project

https://www.facebook.com/BlacksmithTreeProject?ref=br_tf

If you would like this list with links emailed to you please send a request to edhsnews@gmail.com.

Membership Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 2014-15 are due on 1st July but some members have paid already. In order to reduce the need for members to pay their subscription each year we will introduce the option of paying for your membership for a 3 year period from 1 July 2014.

Details of current subscriptions are:

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|-----------------------|---------|---------|---------------|---------|
| Single member | 2014-15 | \$25.00 | 3 year option | \$75.00 |
| Newsletter | 2014-15 | \$15.00 | 3 Year option | \$45.00 |
| Family | 2014-15 | \$30.00 | 3 Year option | \$90.00 |
| Business organisation | 2014-15 | \$30.00 | 3 Year option | \$90.00 |

An invoice will soon be sent to all currently listed members, but payment can be made to David Johns at the July meeting or sent to the Society's post office box - P.O. Box 137 Eltham.

And Also

It is good to see a significant number of members assisting at our records workshops, particularly the Monday morning sessions. If you would like to assist but cannot come on the specified dates then individual arrangements can be made for appropriate tasks and dates. There are some jobs that could be done at home. Talk to a Committee member if you are interested. Coming dates for our scheduled workshops at our Local History Centre are:

Mondays 9.30 am 21st July 18th August
Tuesdays 7.30 pm 1st July 5th August

The Rotary Club of Eltham has invited the Society to arrange a display at the Eltham Festival on Sunday 9th November 2014. Our display last year was considered a worthwhile exercise with many people viewing our exhibits and speaking with Society members. The Committee has agreed that we should participate again this year, so this is a preliminary notice to members who might be available to assist on the day.

Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

- Jim Connor, President – Telephone 9439 5916
- Russell Yeoman, Secretary – Telephone 9439 9717
- David Johns, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Telephone 9434 3357

The Eltham District Historical Society
appreciates the financial support provided by the
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Committee of Management



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