

# Newsletter

No. 220 January 2015



## Big Pond

by Liz Pidgeon

History comes alive and can connect us to it via the power of stories. The stories of the Yan Yean Reservoir are probably many and varied from its early days as swamp land and the role it played in aboriginal life through to the early days of its construction as a result of an idea by ex-convict John Blackburn. The post war years saw it become a popular spot for picnics for post war new Australian immigrants building a new life in places like Lalor and Thomastown – and it continues that tradition today.

I recently had the pleasure of witnessing history come alive through the play “Big Pond” staged at the original caretaker’s cottage at the Reservoir. In front of a small intimate audience, the play centred on one (usually quiet) day on Tuesday 12th March 1892.

We meet the caretaker John Wilson, his son George and principal character his wife Mary Jane as the day starts with the usual work to be done checking the water levels and today relocating some bluestone rocks as part of the maintenance of the Reservoir’s Park amenities.

But from then on, as they walk out the door, the routine of the day soon comes to disarray as a nosy neighbour, delayed communications and miscommunications and happenings bring unexpected guests and news to the Cottage.



The Caretaker’s Cottage at Yan Yean Reservoir

John Blackburn’s son Maurice arrives and wants to take some photographs of the Reservoir. Millie is coming to stay while her parents are away for the night, much to George’s delight. Millie wants Mary Jane’s help with some sewing, but the school visit is on Thursday and they will expect ginger bread men like last year.

If only these walls could speak. How often do we think this as we tour a local historical landmark? Well history spoke to me as I watched the play performed by the Woodland Players spearheaded by Sue Wright. This small band of volunteers obviously have a love of local history and enjoy sharing it through the power of stagecraft.

Look for the Woodland Players and “Big Pond” for an encore performance in 2015.

## Next Meeting

**8.00pm Wednesday 11th February 2015**  
**Eltham Senior Citizens’ Centre**  
**Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)**

## March - Annual General Meeting

**8.00pm Wednesday 11th March 2015**  
**Eltham Senior Citizens’ Centre**  
**Library Place, Eltham**

## February Meeting

In 2013 our Society was involved in a project for digitisation of the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photo Collection. This was joint project with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library and was funded by a State Government Local History grant. It involved the digitisation of the historic photo collection established by Eltham Shire Council in 1971 and held at the Eltham Library. This project involved some 400 items and concluded the digitisation of the complete collection started earlier by the library. The project was co-ordinated by Liz Pidgeon from YPRL.

The agenda item for our February 2014 meeting was a presentation comprising about 40 images from this collection. For our February meeting this year we will show a further 40 or so slides. Pictures will be selected for their visual interest or for the story that they tell. They will be a representative sample from the whole of the former Shire of Eltham, extending from Lower Plenty to Kinglake.

Introduction and commentary on the pictures will be provided by Maureen Jones, Russell Yeoman and other members. Russell has been involved with the collection since its inception and Maureen has assisted with the recent project. It is hoped that the presentation will inspire comment from members on the photographs or more broadly on their subject matter.

As at all of our meetings, new members and visitors are most welcome.

## News from Eltham UK

For many years we have maintained contact with The Eltham Society based in the historic London suburb of Eltham. A number of our members have visited there and been made most welcome. In 1988 that Society gave us an audio-visual presentation of their Eltham as an Australian Bicentennial present. In the summer of 1997-98 Margaret Taylor and the late Clifford Crate, each a former chairman of The Eltham Society, visited here.

Margaret Taylor has written with Christmas and new year greetings and news of her busy personal life as well as Society activities. 2015 marks the 50th anniversary of the Society and various celebrations are planned. She has also sent this information to the other Elthams in NSW and New Zealand.

The letter was accompanied by a calendar with views of Eltham UK, with two shown below.



Eltham Palace, Great Hall 1479 - Mansion c1930 - from the south moat



Eltham Public Library, built 1906

## A Trip to Balee

by Richard Pinn

I'd like to take a train trip from Eltham to Wattle Glen and look out the window at the view. But not the present-day view: I'd rather see the view as it was 100 years ago. A c.1910 survey map, drawn up for the proposed railway extension from Eltham to Hurst's Bridge, has recently come to light. It shows the intended land acquisitions along the route and gives a detailed insight into what was there at the time. So, what would we have seen way back then?

Just after leaving Eltham station, the line crossed a minor side street (Diamond St), with a more significant road (Main Road) running parallel to the line on the right-hand side. On the left, extending to the nearby Diamond Creek, was cultivated land. The line then swung to the left and crossed a side road (now truncated and called Coleman Crescent) which bridged the creek, providing access to Glen Park (Eltham North). Just past here, on the left, was an extensive orchard (Edendale), with a dwelling and sizeable stables.

But then the railway line had to traverse land which rose steeply away from the creek, necessitating a short cutting. Past this cutting were more orchards and cultivated land (Murrays Wetland), followed by a significant billabong which had originally extended underneath the route of the line for a bit. Next on the left was a large pipe crossing the creek (site of Allendale Road bridge), part of a system of aqueducts and pipes supplying water from Maroondah Reservoir to the residents of Melbourne.



Railway siding at the Union Mine site

The line then crossed the Diamond Creek four times in quick succession, on timber bridges. These were destroyed by a bushfire in 1969 and were replaced by two steel bridges and two corrugated iron culverts. To the right was a large cleared area, the site of the Union Mine, which yielded a huge amount of gold between 1868 and c.1909.

During construction of the railway a siding was put into this area to enable retrieval of the gravel spoil from the mine for use as ballast along the railway line. The siding would have been removed before the Eltham-Hurstbridge line opened in 1912.



Diamond Creek township in 1912  
(looking across the almost-observed railway platform)

On the left were remnants of buildings associated with the mine operation. And behind here could be glimpsed a broad channel where the creek had been temporarily diverted to facilitate construction of the railway. This is now a chain of ponds forming part of Challenger Street Wetlands.

*(continued on page 4)*

## A Trip to Balee *(continued from page 3)*

Next, a little way beyond the fourth bridge was a pipeline emanating from a pumping station on the creek. This led up through Miss Phipps' land on the right. It may have been associated with the Diamond Reef Mine, which was located at the top of the hill above the Union Mine.

Further along on the left was the Diamond Creek Recreation Ground (Marngrook Oval), though sadly a tennis court and a hall had to be removed to make way for the railway. Across the creek was the Diamond Creek township, with hotels and churches prominent. The line then crossed the main road leading from Diamond Creek township to Upper Diamond Creek (the locality between present-day Wattle Glen and Hurstbridge).

Originally, this road crossed the route of the proposed railway at an oblique angle near the present-day McDonalds restaurant. It was re-aligned to cross at more of a right angle, presumably to give road traffic a better view of oncoming trains. Nevertheless, in February 1949, a spectacular accident occurred when a logging truck collided with a passenger train, causing a log to crash through windows of the train. The truck driver was killed instantly and several of the train passengers were injured.



Logging truck and train collision 1949

Photographs kindly provided by the Nillumbik Historical Society

And next there was Diamond Creek railway station! The railway survey map shows space for it, but nothing else. A platform was put in hurriedly just before the line opened in 1912, with buildings being added a few months later. There was a large orchard immediately to the left of the station (now Sacred Heart Primary School).

Just past the station were many more orchards and ploughed land under cultivation. The main road ran mostly parallel to the line, but deviated away at one point to skirt round Mr Pepper's large established orchard. This is now the site of Diamond Creek East Primary School and Diamond Valley College. But previously (circa 1930s?), the Agricultural Department had a railway siding here. Another deviation occurred to ease the road crossing of Watery Gully, a tributary of the Diamond Creek. The main road no longer exhibits this deviation, but part of the original route remains as the untrafficable Old Hurstbridge Road.

And just beyond Watery Gully was Balee railway station. Although the locality was then known as Watery Gully, residents of Kangaroo Ground wanted the new station to be called Cameron after a prominent local resident and parliamentarian, Ewen Hugh Cameron. But the Government opted for a supposedly aboriginal word, Balee. It became Wattle Glen in 1922.

Following a meeting held in the Greensborough Masonic Hall in November 1926 in which Mr. Arthur Iredale reported on what steps the Progress Association had taken regarding the restocking and protection of the Plenty River it was decided to form the Greensborough Angling Club. Entrance fee was to be 5/- for men per annum with children and women 3/- per annum. They saw themselves as an angling and fish protection society.

During that summer the Plenty River catchment was affected by lack of rainfall and the Hurstbridge Advertiser reported that a little water was now flowing as far as South Morang but beyond that the quantity was negligible and a long time resident reported that she had never seen the river as low in 65 years. In January 1929 the Angling Club requested that the Heidelberg Council arrange a deputation to the Board of Works to regularly flush the river from Maroondah Dam aqueduct. The flow of the water had diminished to such an extent that the fish were dying. Regular flushing might prevent the complete extermination of the fish. The Plenty River was then closed to fishing for three years.

For several years the Angling Club met in the Masonic Hall but in 1929 the management began to negotiate for land and Real Estate agent J. St. Clair, opposite the station in Montmorency, advised them that they could purchase a block in Rattray Road (now Para Road) for £95 with £20 deposit and £1 per month. The residue was to be paid within three years and the interest rate was set at 6%. The negotiations were with Miss E. (Eleanor) daughter of John Sims. However it was not until September 1936 that the transfer of land took place between the club and F.I.E. (Florence Isabell Emerson) Sims, another daughter of John Sims. It was at this time that John Sims with his wife and two daughters left their property after 20 years in the district.

The land title served as guarantee for the Club to purchase building material to the value of £200 and the new building was on its way with the first meeting in the club rooms being held on 15th April, 1937. The official opening was held on 21st August, 1937 by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon. W. Everard, M.L.A. The clubrooms have had a further three extensions, in 1978, 1995 and 2000.



The mystery photograph

Carol Jenkinson has donated this photograph to our Society. It was thought to be the opening of the Angling Club in 1937 but current members of the Club do not think it is their hall. The Club used to meet at the Masonic Hall in Greensborough before that, but it is doubtful whether it is this venue. Can anyone provide any information about this photograph?

## 2015 Program

Included with 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 Society meetings as well as dates for other activities, committee meetings, records workshops and heritage excursions. We look forward to members being involved in our various activities during 2015. Any changes during the year will be notified in the Newsletter.

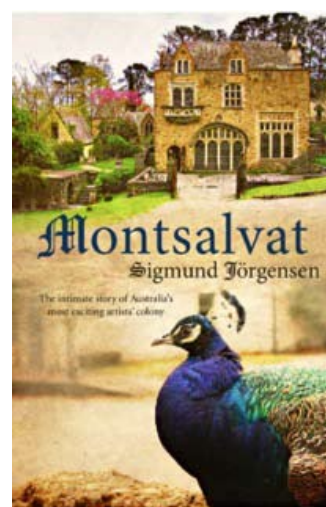
It should be noted that the March meeting is the Annual General Meeting. Formal notice and the agenda for this meeting will be contained in the March Newsletter which will be distributed in time to satisfy statutory notice requirements. The agenda will include a proposal to adopt a new constitution to satisfy the requirements of the Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012.

Members are encouraged to come along to our records workshops to assist with the on-going task of getting our records into systematic order. Members continue to make progress on this and other associated tasks. Our next workshop is at 7.30pm on Tuesday 3rd February.

### Book Review - Montsalvat by Sigmund Jorgensen

Much has been written about Montsalvat, the iconic Eltham art colony founded by Justus Jorgensen, but until now there has been no complete history available. This book, written by the son of the founder, provides details of the property and its unique buildings as well as the many people involved, artists, builders, writers, musicians, intellectuals, the list goes on.

It starts well before the commencement of construction in the 1930s with the arrival of the Jorgensen family in Australia and deals in some detail with the family history. It continues with the various phases of the development over many years and the changes in use from a residence for Jorgensen and his followers to its present role as a tourist destination, function centre and venue for cultural and artistic events. Despite the lack of an index this book is an important addition to the recorded history of Eltham.



### .....and also

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 \$600 for the 2014-2015 financial year, which will be applied towards the operating costs of our Local History Centre. We are grateful to the Council for its support.

### Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

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The Eltham District Historical Society  
appreciates the financial support provided by the  
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