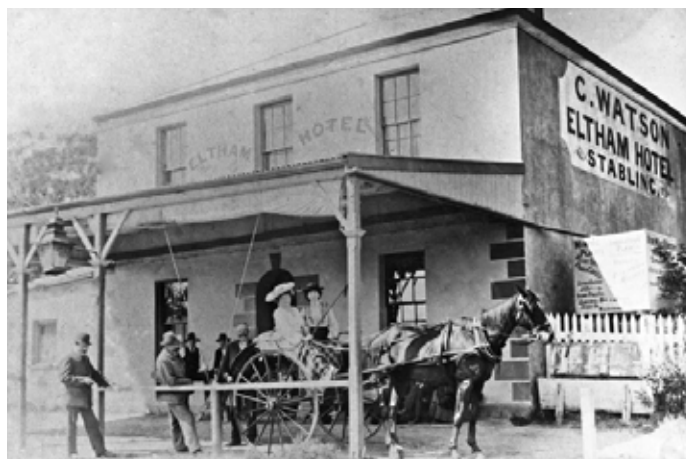## Eltham District - Early History

Based on an article in the Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser - Friday 21st November 1941
While this is an interesting article, later research shows it contains a number of inaccuracies.

Although there are no known records of when the first settlers took up land in the Eltham district, it is recorded that it was created a Road District on 26th September 1856.

Before that, however, it was well known and was called by the blacks 'Nillumbik' and is still known for some official purposes as the Parish of Nillumbik. The township was later called 'Holloway's Township', apparently in honour of the first settler. How it ultimately became to be known as Eltham is uncertain, except that one of the two hotels was named the Eltham Hotel and stood on the site of the present structure bearing that name. Directly opposite was the township's other hostelry, the 'Fountain Inn.' 'Eltham' is the name of a village just outside London and it seems possible that the first owner of the Eltham Hotel came from that part, and that ultimately the district surrounding the hotel came to bear this name.

Watson's Hotel - corner Main Road and Pitt Street, Eltham
from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection

The first rate book for the year ending 14th October 1858 is probably the best record possible to indicate the development of the district. Then properties were rated as follows: Cultivated land, 6d. per acre; pasture land, Id. per acre; estimated annual value of buildings, etc., 6d. in the £. The total amount of rate recorded for the year was £153/14/8. Properties were described as being situated at Lower Plenty, Yarra Yarra, Eltham, Lower Eltham, Kangaroo Ground, Yarra Flats, Diamond Creek and The Yarra.

It was not until 6th April 1871, that the district was proclaimed a Shire. Before then Eltham was part of the Shire of Heidelberg and Mr. C. S. Wingrove was Shire Secretary of the whole area. When the severance took place in 1871, Mr. Wingrove became the first Shire Secretary for Eltham and held that position for many years. On 31st May 1912, the boundaries of the Shire were adjusted by cutting off a portion of the east riding, which became part of the Shire of Healesville.

In the very early days, meetings of the Council were held in the Council's Arms Hotel at Watson's Creek. Later the Council moved to Kangaroo Ground where it met in the hotel for years and as all the records were kept at the hotel, apparently it was regarded as the Shire Office also.

Annual General Meeting
8.00pm Wednesday 13th April 2016
Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre
Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)

Heritage Excursion
Eltham War Memorials Walk
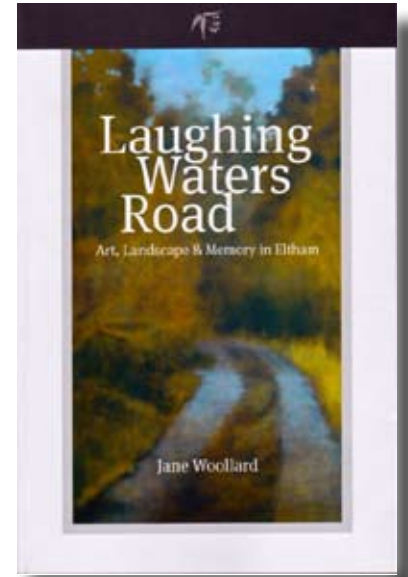**2.00pm Saturday 7th May 2016**
See further details on page 2

Annual General Meeting

Our meeting at 8.00pm on Wednesday 13th April 2016 is our Annual General Meeting, which includes the presentation of annual reports and the election of office bearers for the coming year. The official notification of the Annual General Meeting and the Agenda is on page 7 in this Newsletter.

At this meeting we are pleased to have as our guest speaker Jane Woollard, who has just published a book titled *'Laughing Waters Road: Art, Landscape and Memory in Eltham.'*

Jane was the local history officer at the Shire of Nillumbik so has a detailed knowledge of the history of our area. She has an extensive background as a writer, theatre director and teacher. As well as directing over 50 productions Jane has been a tutor and guest director at the Victorian College of the Arts and La Trobe University and was Artistic Director of the Union House Theatre at the University of Melbourne.

Laughing Waters Road
by Jane Woollard

Since 2001 more than eighty artists have been in residence at Laughing Waters in Birrarung House and Riverbend. In her book Jane has woven together their experiences and art making, together with Wurundjeri, European and family histories to create an evocative account of a very special place in Eltham. Society members and visitors are welcome to attend our meeting to hear Jane speak and share the experiences of Laughing Waters Road.

Heritage Excursion - Eltham War Memorials Walk - Saturday 7th May 2016

Over the past two years our Society along with other similar organizations has participated in the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War. This heritage excursion is a further event in that commemoration.

Within our local area many memorials, honour boards and the like were installed after that war. New memorials and additions to the earlier ones were established after the Second World War and there have been subsequent conflicts that are also commemorated. Within Eltham there are a number of memorials dedicated to locals who served Australia in times of war.

Part of the new Eltham Avenue of Honour memorials in Main Road

This walk on Saturday 7th May will visit a number of memorials along Main Road starting with the heritage listed Avenue of Honour. Along the way we will hear the stories of some of those who are honoured on the memorials. It will include a visit to our Local History Centre where there will be a display featuring memorials beyond the area of the walk.

This walk is about 2 km in length and will take 2 to 2.5 hours. It will start at 2pm at the car park in Wingrove Park near the intersection of Main and Mount Pleasant Roads. (Melway ref.21 J8). This is a one way walk finishing at the Eltham shopping centre. Private arrangements are required to return to the start such as bus or a return walk.

This free walk is open to the general public as well as Society members. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.

An Interesting Little Historical Exercise

<div align="right">Michael Aitken</div>

Following on from my 'Old Postcards of Eltham' article in the last newsletter (No. 226 February 2016) I thought this little historical exercise may be of interest.

One of the first cards to come into my collection was this view of Main Rd. Eltham about 1910. The photographer is standing close to the intersection of Bridge Street and looking north. Shillinglaw Cottage is just visible at the bend of the road.

Postcard c.1910

About 1967 I endeavoured to take the same view as seen in the colour photo. Rosemary's little Ford Prefect is parked on the left side of the road. The brick building is actually the 'new' Shire Office located on the former site of Shillinglaw Cottage, which had just been moved a little way south.

In November 2015 I brought the same scene up to date. We see that Main Road is now a four lane highway with a median strip of vegetation; there are bus-stops and traffic lights and the Shire Office building has long disappeared.

So we have a small glimpse of the progress of Eltham over the past 100 years.

......I personally prefer the old Eltham.

All photographs supplied by Michael Aitken

Colour photograph c.1967

Digital photograph 2015

Eltham's Inclined Railway

Richard Pinn

Starting from the southern end of Hillcrest Avenue in Eltham South is an old track leading down to the Yarra River. Officially a road reserve, in practice this steep, slippery, dangerous track is suitable only for mountain goats and foolhardy humans. In 1984, the Nillumbik Orienteering Club published a detailed map of the area, with field research and cartography by Russell Yeoman (and others). The map shows the track, but it also shows something more interesting: a railway line running parallel to the track, descending the steep incline to the river.

At the top of the track is a sumptuous, immaculately-maintained mansion called Treetops. It was built in about 1910 and restored in the late 1980s; an extension was added in around 1999. A separate outbuilding providing self-contained accommodation was built in the 1950s, when landscape gardening and other external features were also added. The owner in the late 1980s was singer/songwriter Mike Brady (of Up There Cazaly fame) who added a modern garage designed by Alistair Knox (or possibly by Alistair's son Hamish). Treetops has changed hands four times since then: it was sold in June 2014 for $2.2 million, and again in December 2015 for an undisclosed amount.

The railway (near the top) in 1968 - photograph by Michael Aitken

Originally, Treetops extended all the way down to the river, though the bottom portion is now public land. The railway line was constructed on the property in about 1930 as a sort of slipway for boats, which were winched down to the water from a shed near the house. The locals would gather for boating parties. (I take "boating party" to mean a pleasure outing involving several boats, rather than "partying".) The top section of the line is still intact, and the rusted frame of a trolley can even be seen, as well as gear wheels from the winch. The railway was no longer in use by 1966 (but may have closed somewhat earlier).

Treetops in 2015 - from real estate information

Today, there is a very pleasant riverside walking track going through from Griffith Park Road to Sweeneys Lane, though a relatively short middle section (upstream from Treetops) is on private lands. The railway line used to cross over this riverside track; in fact (from personal experience) it was a bit of a tripping hazard for walkers. That portion of the line has since been removed, but some pieces of rail can be seen in the nearby bush.

The neighbouring property to Treetops (downstream) was called Griffith Park. It included a tennis court, with a palm tree in each corner, situated on the river flats. Its legacy is a very level section of ground beside the walking track. Immediately below this site, almost at the river's edge, can be found two fragments of a wall. The slight curvature suggests that it wasn't part of a building, yet it seems too ornate to have been a mere retaining wall. My guess is that it formed the back of a riverside viewing platform or mooring platform.

The mystery wall - photograph by Richard Pinn

(Thanks to Michael Aitken for providing most of the material for this article.)

50th Anniversary Commemorations
Jim Connor

At noon on Sunday 21st February 2016 the Vietnam Veterans Association held simultaneous commemorative services at grave sites in 35 Victorian cemeteries, where Australian service personnel who died during the Vietnam War are buried. The services were part of the 50th anniversary commemorations of the Battle of Long Tan and the Vietnam War.

One such service was held in the Eltham Cemetery at the grave of David Anthony Wallis, who served as a signalman in the 110th Signal Squadron of the Australian Army. During 1969 -1970 he spent 387 days in Vietnam. He returned to Australia on the 24th September 1970 and died in the Repatriation General Hospital in Heidelberg from illness on the 17th March 1972.

David Anthony Wallis was born on the 12th January 1948 and was 24 years old when he died. His father was Walter Briggs Wallis and his mother Astra Esme Wallis (nee Carse) and it is thought their home address was 36 Arthur Street, Eltham.

David Anthony Wallis
photograph - Australian War Memorial

Eltham Commemorative Service
photograph - Jim Connor

Wallis Family Grave
photograph - Jim Connor

The 110th Signal Squadron was raised in 1966 as part of the 2nd Signal Regiment to provide communication support during the Vietnam War. Squadron members remained in Vietnam until 1972, when they returned to the Regiment at Watsonia Barracks in Melbourne.

David was one of almost 60,000 Australians, including 10,500 Victorians, who served during the Vietnam War. Of the 521 Australians who did not return 98 who died during active service in Vietnam are buried throughout Victoria

This service was attended by Vietnam Veterans, RSL members, local Federal and State Members of Parliament, Nillumbik Shire Councillors, representatives of the Eltham Cemetery Trust and members of the public.

The intention of these services was to also encourage the community to better understand and reflect on the Vietnam War – Australia's longest military engagement of the 20th century.

Kenneth Francis Pitts

Wendy Pitts-Butler

Ken or "Pittsy" was born in Essendon on 25th February 1919 to George and Ethel Pitts (nee Parsons). He was the youngest of three children, after Donald and Margie. He had a childhood memory of making model aeroplanes at his Grandma's house in Beard Street, Eltham and jumping off a low roof to test his parachuting skills.

Ken's schooling included Research Primary School and Collingwood Technical College which he attended until he was 15 years old, when he left to get a job because of the Depression. His first job was in a horse and cart business painting horse jinkers for 14 shillings and six pence per week. During the Second World War he worked at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation as a draftsman in the aeroplane engine division. In his youth Ken knew no fear and often raced Les Castledine, his brother-in-law and ongoing friend, to work on their motorbikes. After the War he continued his lifelong involvement in engineering when he started work with his father at the back of their house at 1144 Main Road, Eltham.

Ken Pitts 1997

Ken married Lila Castledine, one of the eleven children of the Castledine family of Lower Plenty and their marriage was blessed with 5 children, Wendy, Dennis, Judy and Faye (twins) and the youngest Debbie. Wendy attended Eltham Primary School and Eltham High School. Dennis went to Eltham Primary School then to the Preston Technical Trade School. Judy and Faye attended Eltham Primary School then Eltham High School and Debbie went to Grove Street Primary School and Eltham High School.

Ken continued to work with his father at the rear of his home until he and his brother Don built a factory at 1140-1142 Main Road, Eltham (K F Pitts Engineering), the building is still there today. He was an inventor, mechanic and engineer through and through and built up his own business. He designed and manufactured agricultural machinery that was distributed Australia-wide and exported to South Africa. He developed mowers and slashers for orchardists and farmers, as well as mowing and general equipment for the Shire of Eltham for many years. He was a man who never read instructions – he didn't need to, he always got things right.

Ken had a passion for motor racing and raced for 17 years, including against Peter Brock in car races at Albury, Winton, Sandown, Wangaratta and Phillip Island and also competed in hill climbs at Rob Roy, etc. He raced his Austin Healey and Mini Cooper S at these events and won many Trophies (1955-1972). Ken also had a love for nice cars, including Ford Mustangs, Ferraris and Porsches. You would always see him driving around Eltham in a nice car.

Ken sold the business in 1985 but never fully retired. He would always be in his garage workshop designing and manufacturing and made a lot of display stands and wire baskets for the sock industry. Lila Passed away in 1987, Ken passed away in 1997.

(Thanks to Joan Castledine for sourcing this article and photographs.)

Ken Pitts and some of this cars

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 13th April 2016 at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre.

The agenda of the Annual General Meeting is set out below in accordance with the rules.

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2015 Annual General Meeting
3. Reports
    a. President's Report
    b. Financial 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
    Society Secretary
    Treasurer/Membership Secretary
    Ordinary Committee Members (minimum of three members)
5. Election of Membership Sub-Committee (three members)
6. Fixing of entrance fee (if any) and annual subscription
7. 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 for all positions are to be made at the meeting.

Each year we urge members to contribute to the operation 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 five committee meetings each year, alternating with our society meetings. We warmly welcome fresh ideas to help us run a vibrant organisation.

The Evelyn Observer

A weekly newspaper originally called the Evelyn Observer was published from 1873 to 1942 in the north-east area of Melbourne. It was first published on 31st October 1873 from the school house at Kangaroo Ground. Andrew Ross, the district's first school master and hotel-keeper was the Observer's first proprietor and he enlisted the help of a printer, John Rossiter who also became the first editor. The earliest surviving issue is 15th October 1875, held at the State Library of Victoria.

The newspaper covered the subjects of agriculture and mining as well as horticulture in later years and was usually four pages in length and cost between two and three pence. Robert Charles Harris became the proprietor and editor from 1885 and continued

The Evelyn Observer building on the hill at Kangaroo Ground

in this role until his death in 1921, only four years after he relocated the newspaper to Hurstbridge. While the newspaper continued under abridged titles (e.g. Hurstbridge and then Eltham Advertiser), it was overtaken by other titles across the Diamond Valley and ceased publication in 1942.

Article based on information from Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evelyn_Observer

Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Tower

From The Age (Melbourne, Victoria) - Saturday 21st September 1929

The motorist will find unbounded pleasure in a less known and beautiful run through Heidelberg and Eltham to the War Memorial at Kangaroo Ground, and return via Yarra Glen and Lilydale.

Follow Heidelberg Road through Clifton Hill and Alphington to Heidelberg, and then continue on through Eltham and Research to Kangaroo Ground. The first turn to the right after passing through the township will lead to the Memorial. A panorama of glory unfolds itself from the tower— the surrounding country being visible for incredible distances.

Continue along the Memorial Road, take the first turn to the left and follow Watson's Creek to Christmas Hills. A steep descent is then made into Yarra Glen. Cross the Yarra and proceed over the river flats, up through Lilydale and Ringwood and enter the City through Box Hill and Kew.

The whole tour (72 miles) is over good roads, and the run is made memorably delightful by the visit to the Eltham War Memorial.

Kangaroo Ground War Memorial c1929 photograph from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection

This article obtained from TROVE - http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del article/204155964

...and also

It is good to see an increasing 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. Some jobs can be done on a "take home" basis. Talk to a Committee member if you are interested.

Coming dates for our scheduled workshops at our Local History Centre are:

Tuesdays 7.30pm	5th April	3rd May
Mondays 9.30am	18th April	16th May

Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

- Jim Connor, President – Telephone 0418 379 497
- Russell Yeoman, Secretary – Telephone 9439 9717
- David Johns, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Telephone 9434 3357

We appreciate the financial support provided by
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Committee of Management

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