

# Newsletter

No. 231 December 2016



## Our Past, Present and Future

Jim Connor

As our Historical Society moves towards our 50th year in 2017 it is appropriate to reflect on our past, present and future and how successful we, as part of our community, have been in helping retain historical character elements within our local neighbourhoods.

Can we continue to work to protect and conserve spaces and places considered to have notable connections with our valued local history? Can the desire to retain our communal memories and neighbourhood character succeed against the ongoing demand to redevelop, by others intent on maximising economic returns, regardless of the impacts on surrounding areas?

Our Society has recently appeared at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) as an objector in an appeal to review an earlier planning decision by Nillumbik Shire Council. Their decision was to refuse an application for the redevelopment of the well known former Burgoyne's Store/Post Office property at 820 Main Road, Eltham. The applicant intends to redevelop the land for 2 shops, extend the existing building and construct 3 two bedroom dwellings at first floor level. This property within the Eltham Gateway has a heritage overlay and our Society and others consider such a development would be significantly detrimental to this highly visible, historically important building. It is one of only two substantially intact early 20th Century shops remaining in Eltham. While we do not yet know of VCAT's decision, this application has again highlighted how tenuous heritage protection can be in the face of sustained redevelopment pressures.



J N Burgoyne store c1930  
Photograph from the Shire of  
Eltham Pioneers Photograph collection



820 Main Road, Eltham in 2010

On many occasions since our establishment in 1967 we have taken a strong position in important heritage matters and will continue to encourage recognition and conservation of significant places, spaces, records and documents. In doing so we also encourage our members, and those responsible for making decisions, to value heritage protection, now and into the future.

*We hope you enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time over Christmas  
and have a healthy and successful year in 2017*

See page 8 for details about our Christmas function on Wednesday 14th December

It was 1950 and I had just been promoted to the house-room, a significant step forward in the hierarchy of the English boys' boarding school to which my parents had consigned me at the age of 11.

Among the privileges of house-room membership, undoubtedly the most important was the right to have a fire, which trained us to be opportunistic wood scavengers. Of only slightly less importance was the right to toast crumpets around the fire and to listen to our very limited collection of records on Mike Jenkins' turntable.

Among the half dozen 78s, one particularly took my attention. It was on the Esquire label and featured Graham Bell and his Australian Jazz Band playing 'South'. This was the first peal in a cotillion of coincidences.



A 1948 recording of 'South' by Graeme Bell and his Australian Jazz Band

### Peal 2

It is September 1984 and we are at the other end of the world in Australia. The scene is Gordon and Gwen Ford's garden; landscaped by the prince of native landscape architects himself - Gordon. It is a glorious Eltham day and the garden is packed by a noisy crowd to celebrate the return to Eltham of a former neighbour and resident, Graeme Bell - the renowned father of Australian jazz. Although for many years a harbour side dweller in Sydney, Graeme, pronounced Grame, made an annual pilgrimage to John Street Eltham, where he and his brother Roger built a sturdy mud brick cottage before taking their band to Europe and international fame. Today is a particularly special day with Graeme celebrating his 70th birthday. Perhaps surprisingly there were no musical instruments in the garden although a small group led by the Marginson brothers and bass player Joe McConechy gave a passable mouth music rendition of 'South', before the Master of Ceremonies called for a chorus of 'Happy Birthday'. Now here is the rub. At Gwen Ford's invitation the M.C. was me.

### Peal 3

Obviously the mixture of happenstance and kismet, which brought my family to Eltham and Australia is a longer story. At some point along the way I met Allen Leake, leader of the Storyville Jazz Band and we put together some jazz for events in Albert Park and for the Eltham Festival. Donated air tickets made it possible to bring Graeme Bell back to Eltham to play in the Alistair Knox Park.

Our greatest opportunity came with Australia's Bi-Centenary. Allen and I approached Sigmund Jorgensen with a suggestion to stage a major jazz event at Montsalvat. Thus was the Montsalvat Jazz Festival born and in 1988 we presented 'A History of Australian Jazz'. In this we tried to bring together the original line-ups of the bands which attended a seminal event in Australian jazz - the first Australian Jazz Convention in 1946. This again deserves another story. Suffice to say Graeme Bell was one of our first contacts and he helped us to track down all those who played in the original band, which he took to Europe. They played together for the last time at Montsalvat and the Great Hall rang with the sound of the Bells.



Graeme Bell, Ross Monroe, 'Pixie' Roberts and 'Lazy' Ade Monsburgh at rehearsal in the Montsalvat Chapel in January 1988. Photograph courtesy of Malcolm Cross

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### Peal 4

It would be easy to write finis and leave the Bells silent, but somehow I feel another clanger coming on. Graeme passed away in 2012 predeceased by younger brother Roger by 4 years. Roger's contribution to the Bell band as trumpeter and vocalist should not be underrated. As Graeme wrote 'Roger taught me how to play it' (jazz).

Sadly the arts have no Anzac Day and we tend to forget some of the 'peaceful achievers' whose roles in art, industry, medicine, science and technology are rarely mentioned in today's learning curriculum. What about Seniors Week becoming a baton passing intergenerational event when schools learn about and pay tribute to the past? My imagination saw the Shire of Nillumbik taking a lead supported by the U3A.

### Peal 5

Remarkably my co-tutor for the Nillumbik U3A Jazz Appreciation course, John Crichton and I, were given the opportunity by the Shire to put together an event for Seniors Week 2016. We chose to create a Bell Brothers Tribute Tea Dance and October 14th saw a sell out event, which featured a group of professional Melbourne musicians all of whom had played with Graeme and Roger Bell.

Ian Smith brought the group together and led the band on trumpet, Chris Ludowick played trombone and Dave Hetherington completed the front line on clarinet. 93 year old Wes Brown belied his age with a lively driving contribution on drums and washboard in a rhythm section featuring John Cox on banjo and Mark Elton on bass. Stephen Grant, the multi-instrumentalist and piano virtuoso rounded out a band familiar with the Bells' music .



Graeme Bell and his Australian Jazz Band - 1952  
Back row: Don 'Pixie' Roberts, Bud Baker,  
Lou Silbereisen, Graeme Bell  
Front row: Roger Bell, John Sangster,

The Eltham High School Jazz Band under the tutelage of Ed Fairlie did indeed highlight the ageless nature of Graeme and Roger's music, with the thoughtful Stephen Grant backing the school's set on piano, to give the true Bell sound and feel; but nothing quite prepared either the audience and possibly even some of the band members for an extraordinary final "jam". Tribute band and school band shared memorable moments as they interchanged leads and harmonies with the supreme highlight of the afternoon being the sight of three drummers (Wes Brown - Tribute Band, Brendon Waterworth - Eltham High School and Ian Smith - Tribute Band) sharing one drum.

Thanks to Maddie Vincent Gilmartin, Tobi Azeez, James Farrough, Harry Petrou and Brendon Waterworth and music teacher Ed Fairlie from Eltham High School for their contribution.

So the first Nillumbik Tribute to former residents Graeme and Roger Bell happened and is part of the area's artistic history. Will we hear more peals, or can we sustain a range of tributes to former residents of national and international significance?

Peter Paul Lawlor Eltham's first Policeman was born in 1821 in Laois, Ireland the son of Daniel Lawlor and Bridget Mulhall. His occupation while in Ireland was a policeman. In January 1855 Peter married Catherine Ledwedge in Dublin, Ireland. Records indicate that Catherine went under several names during her life and seems to have preferred Kate to Catherine and sometimes used her maiden name Ledwedge, in lieu of her married name Lawlor.

On the 20th February 1855 Peter and Kate left Liverpool, England aboard the ship Salem arriving in Melbourne on the 15th May 1855. On the 18th August 1856 Peter joined the Victorian Police as an ordinary constable with the registered number 668. His records indicate he was of medium appearance with a dark complexion, was 5' 9 ½" tall with brown hair. On enlistment he had stated his age was 30 years, but from other records this may have been manipulated to his advantage to make him appear younger.

In July 1857 Constable Peter Lawlor opened the Coburg Police Station, the first Police Station in the area, which was a four room weatherboard house rented for 12 shillings a week. On the 1st December 1858 he was promoted to the rank of senior constable. On the 10th December 1866 the Government listed him as bailiff of crown land at Eltham. His term of service at Eltham was from 1857 to 1872.

During their marriage Peter and Kate produced 10 offspring, though unfortunately a number of these died very early in life. After having experienced the loss of their second child and recognising the possibility of the family having a high infancy mortality rate, as often happened in Australia during the 1800s, Peter purchased a Catholic Church grave site (number 22) at the Eltham Cemetery for £1 on the 2nd March 1862. Details of their children are as follows:

Name	Date of Birth	Location	Date of Death	Location
<b>Mary Anne</b> Lawlor	1856	Northcote	8 October 1923	Carlton
<b>Joseph Daniel</b> Lawlor	1857	Collingwood	1932	Prahran
<b>Jeremiah Michael</b> Lawlor	28/12/1859	Eltham	22 /1/1860	Eltham
<b>Margaret Sarah</b> Lawlor	28 /12/1861	Eltham	Interred 2/3/1862	Eltham
<b>Albert Ledwedge</b> Lawlor	1863	Eltham	1929	Sydney
<b>Peter Vincent De Paul</b> Lawlor	1864	Eltham	20 /4/1929	Adelaide
<b>Alfred Ernest</b> Lawlor	1868		1938 Whangarel	New Zealand
<b>Maud Kate</b> Lawlor June	1869	Eltham	Interred 26/6/69	1 day old Eltham
<b>Edith Beatrice</b> Lawlor	16 Feb 1872	Eltham	5 March 1873	Windsor
<b>Gregory</b> Lawlor	1874	South Yarra	1945	Cheltenham

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A check of Eltham Primary School records indicates that four of Peter and Kate's surviving children attended this school.

Name	Roll Number	Date of Enrolment	Age Started	Date Leaving	Age Leaving
<b>Mary Anne</b>					
Lawlor	4	January 1864	8 years 2 months	December 1869	13
<b>Joseph Daniel</b>					
Lawlor	14	January 1864	6 years 5 months	February 1872	13
<b>Albert Ledwedge</b>					
Lawlor	67	July 1866	4 years	March 1872	10
<b>Peter Vincent de Paul</b>					
Lawlor	126	February 1869	5 years 1 month	March 1872	8

As a policeman serving a large area Peter spent a lot of time on horseback at all hours of the day. His work covered a wide range of tasks from investigating murders to giving evidence in court. One incident he investigated, that received quite a bit of publicity, was the death of Margaret Graham who was found dead in the bush near Diamond Creek at 12 O'clock on the night of the 31st March 1864. After an autopsy the jury returned a verdict to the effect that the deceased was found lying dead without marks of violence on her body and they were of the opinion that the evidence was not sufficient to justify them in returning the exact cause of death.



Eltham Primary School c 1875  
Photograph from the collection of the  
Eltham District Historical Society

An unfortunate incident occurred on Wednesday 5th October 1864, when a mounted trooper John McAlveen and his companion were drowned in a flooded gully while conveying voting papers to Eltham. Peter Lawlor became a witness when McAlveen's horse was brought to the Police Station. Another unusual circumstance was that both men were witnessed to have been travelling on one horse. The final outcome of the case was that the jury found that the men were accidentally drowned.

An article in the Argus Newspaper, dated the 13th March 1872, reported that a well attended testimonial was held in the Eltham Court House for Senior Constable Lawlor. At the meeting Mr Ford JP presented Mr Lawlor with a handsome tea service that had been subscribed for by residents of the district. Mr Ford expressed his genuine regret at Mr Lawlor's removal. Lawlor in reply said the compliment was unexpected as he believed he was only doing his duty. He admitted that having to leave Eltham, where he had spent the happiest years of his life, was a great disappointment to him. He then gave his most sincere thanks for the tea set and the kind words.

From 1872 he was stationed at Prahran. On the 30th September 1875 the Government Gazette mentioned that Peter had been posted to the Footscray wharves. While there most of his tasks, according to papers of the day, appear to relate to patrolling the metropolitan area close to the city. He was regularly mentioned for charging people with alcohol related offences.

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Peter's record of service with the Victorian Police indicates that he was discharged from the force on 31st December 1875, the reason being bodily infirmity (unfit for further service). Unfortunately, he did not survive long enough to enjoy his retirement. On page 2 of the Age Newspaper on 14th February 1876 it states that senior constable Peter Lawlor, who had been in charge of the Footscray Police District and had served as a policeman for nearly 20 years, died on Saturday the 12th February 1876 and was buried at Eltham on the 14th February 1876.

Now we come to the family mystery of what happened to Kate his wife? I have previously had some success scanning through Public Record Office probate records and in this case it worked again. I found records for Catherine Lawlor (otherwise known as Kate Lawlor). Catherine Lawlor died at Footscray on 1st May 1893 at 62 years of age without leaving a will. Family notices were placed in the Australasian and Leader newspapers.

Now at this point in time it would appear that this is the end of the story, but it is not so. In 1984 the Genealogical Society of Victoria published a book of cemetery inscriptions in our part of Victoria. The Eltham Cemetery was covered from 1863 to 1947. However, whilst it is known the headstone for Peter Lawlor and his children was there in 1984, it was found to be missing in 1985, when a further survey of head stones was carried out.

Mysteriously the headstone turned up again on an August night in 2013 when it was left in Mount Pleasant Road, outside the main entry point to the Eltham Cemetery. It was in a soggy cardboard box, was broken into three pieces, and covered in deep green fungus. Despite a plea for information from Harry Gilham in the Eltham District Historical Society newsletter, no one to this day has been able to establish where the grave stone was during the period it went missing.



The broken Lawlor headstone after being returned  
Photograph by Jim Connor

At the time when his retirement documentation was being processed his superintendent stated "He was a First Class Officer and I regret very much losing his services, he was active, intelligent and most trustworthy"

Although Peter did come into conflict with his superiors on occasion, for being absent from duty, it is felt his career overall was worthwhile and successful. He also received several gratis payments from the Policeman's fund for particular incidents that were considered to have been well done. Unfortunately, his body gave out before he progressed any further in his lifetime career.

As acknowledgement of the important contribution to the law and order provided to the Eltham District, by Senior Constable Peter Paul Lawlor and other members of the Police force and the judiciary, one of the rooms at the former Police residence at 728 Main Road, Eltham has been named the Lawlor Room. The Eltham District Historical Society now uses this property as their Local History Centre.

It should be noted that that during this account there are some discrepancies in recorded dates and it is left to the reader to decide which reference they wish to believe.

### References:

Notes provided by Eltham District Historical Society  
Births, Deaths and Marriages  
Victorian Probate Records  
Trove

Eltham Cemetery Records  
Eltham Primary School Records  
Victorian Police Museum Records  
Public Records Office

The Northern Rivers region of New South Wales, close to the Queensland border, features some of the most verdant scenery in the state. It has the appearance of traditional English countryside interspersed with sub-tropical rainforest. European settlers had opened up the region by the 1880s, initially with cedar logging, then with grazing, sugarcane and maize production and dairy farming. It became famous (or infamous) in the 1970s for the hippie communes around Nimbin, which is now more noted for its cheese. Today, dairy farming, macadamia production and tourism are the major industries.

For thousands of years, the Bundjalung people had occupied the rainforest, with small areas gradually becoming cleared by them for overnight camps. When Europeans first arrived in about 1853, they named one such cleared area Midgee Grass, and this later became the small settlement of Mayfield. When a branch railway line from Casino to Murwillumbah opened in 1894, one of the intermediate stations was at Mayfield, but the name was soon changed to Eltham (possibly to avoid confusion with the Newcastle suburb of Mayfield).

Most of the smaller stations along the line, including Eltham, closed in 1974. The platform at Eltham has since been demolished and there is now a tennis court on the site. The entire line closed in 2004 and is becoming overgrown. There is a proposal to convert it to a rail trail (which would boost tourism to Eltham); funding has been sought from the NSW Government.

The most prominent historical feature at Eltham is probably the railway bridge across the Wilson River. But in recent years, something else has come to the fore. Located between the bridge and the railway station site is the historic Eltham Railway Cottage, which was built in 1894 as the Eltham Station Gatekeeper's Cottage.

In 2006, the local community became concerned that it was facing demolition. They established the Eltham Community Foundation (ECF), which actively sought to save the cottage with a view to its restoration and re-use. With the help of the Eltham Masonic Lodge, the ECF undertook fund-raising activities (film screenings, concerts, raffles) and in 2009 distributed survey forms to all homes and businesses in Eltham in order to gauge public opinion. The responses indicated a desire for the cottage to be turned into an Archive/ Museum and possible Tourist Information Centre. A formal submission was made to the Lismore City Council. The Council officers noted that the cottage was in poor condition, being badly damaged on one side and overgrown with vines, and that vandalism and the effect of weather had detracted from its appearance.



Eltham Railway Station  
Photograph from Eltham Community Foundation archives



The Cooke family in front of the Railway House.  
William Cooke and daughters Matilda, Ethel and Alice, about 1905

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## Eltham NSW - Railway Cottage

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Moreover, an environmental assessment conducted in 2005 had found the site to be contaminated with lead, arsenic and asbestos. (A 1930 advertisement by James Hardie & Co stated that their Fibrolite asbestos cement sheeting was “extensively used by the NSW Government Railways”. That’s a bit of a worry!) Although the cottage isn’t listed on any heritage register, Council acknowledged its historical importance and its significance to the local community, and that it would complement the proposed rail trail.

Good sense prevailed; this story has a happy ending. At its meeting in March 2015, Council agreed to lease the cottage from Transport NSW (the owner) for a nominal sum (or maybe purchase it for \$1) and to sub-lease it to the ECF at a peppercorn rent. The ECF will be responsible for restoring, refurbishing and maintaining the cottage, but Council will apply for funding grants on behalf of the ECF.

### Main sources:

Lismore City Council website, Eltham Freemasons website.



Eltham Railway Cottage - 2009

Photograph by John Boom

## Our Christmas Function

We again look forward to welcoming members to an enjoyable evening shared with friends, at our Christmas function on Wednesday 14th December 2016, from 6.30pm, in the Eltham Courthouse annexe. This is entered up the ramp from the rear car park at our recently refurbished Local History Centre, which will be open for inspection at times during our Christmas function.

As in the past, our Society will provide some meat and cheese platters and desserts. Members are asked to bring a salad or fruit plate to share and any other items, such as nibbles that they would like to contribute. Please contact Sue on 9439 9520 if in doubt about what to bring.

There is no formal agenda but as for the last few years Jim Connor will screen some local historical photographs and others from his own collection.



## 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

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*and*

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