

Newsletter

No. 237 December 2017



The Carnival is Over....*well just about !*

Jim Connor

In this our 50th year the Eltham District Historical Society actively commemorated this significant milestone during various activities, with the last event being our Christmas function, as detailed at page two in this edition.....*so our celebration carnival for 2017 is just about over!*

Some of the achievements and activities this anniversary year have included:

- completion of the first major refurbishment of our Local History Centre since it was established in 1998;
- a total reorganisation of our centre to set EDHS up for our future years;
- purchase and installation of new computer, scanning and wifi equipment;
- an extensive scanning and cataloguing project that has resulted in over 5,500 of our records and images being available on the Victorian Collections website;
- extensive work by members on refining and recording our collection;
- our celebration meeting, appropriately including a birthday cake, in June close to the 50th anniversary of the 6th June 1967 meeting called to consider establishment of an historical society for the then Shire of Eltham;
- activities in conjunction with the Eltham Library to promote our local history;
- production of a video to recognise our 50th year;
- various local history tours for schools and groups of our historic justice precinct;
- contributions to the 'Our Eltham - Artistic Recollections' installation at the Eltham Cemetery;
- our 50th anniversary dinner on 27th October, as detailed at page four of this newsletter;
- heritage excursions around areas of local historic interest;
- further community engagement at our marquee at the Rotary Eltham Festival;
- our Christmas function on 13th December to bring to a close our 50th year.

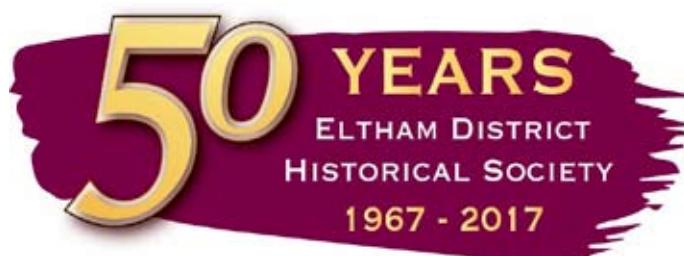
Indeed, this has been a busy and successful year with many important achievements, assisted by the valued commitments and personal donations from members, with support from Nillumbik Shire Council, which have all contributed to preparing our society for our future years.

*We hope you enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time over Christmas
and have a healthy and successful year in 2018*

See page 2 for details about our Christmas function on Wednesday 13th December

During this 50th Anniversary year we have been revisiting the history of our Society, including those people who contributed to the establishment of the Shire of Eltham Historical Society in 1967, known since the local government restructure process in 1993/94 as the Eltham District Historical Society.

In this final edition of our newsletter for 2017, we would like to acknowledge all other members, including those who contributed in the early days to the establishment of our society and those individuals, who in the 50 years since, have been involved in operating and developing it further. The following members have held senior positions within our executive over these years:



Presidents

Charis Pelling	1967 - 1975
Peter Bassett-Smith	1976 - 1979
Kath Stephenson	1980 - 1984
Sue Law	1985 - 1992
Harry Gilham	1993 - 2008
Jim Connor	2009 - 2017

Treasurers / Membership Secretaries *

Greg Huggins	1967 - 1968
Graham Beyer	1969 - 1984
Opal Smith	1985 - 1990 *
Gwen Orford	1991 - 2005 *
David Johns	2006 - 2017 *

Life Members

Sue Law
Russell Yeoman
Harry Gilham
Gwen Orford
Doug Orford
Mary Regan
Diana Bassett - Smith

Unfortunately it is not possible to mention each and every person who has been involved during this time, but we recognise that without all their ongoing support, energies, ideas and contributions the Eltham District Historical Society would not have continued to exist and develop, as it has. We now look to many more years of valuing, recording and promoting our local history.



Society Christmas Function

Our last event for this our 50th anniversary year will be our Christmas function to be held at 6.30pm on Wednesday 13th December 2017. **Please note** the location has changed from recent years and it will be at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place Eltham, where we hold our regular Society meetings. We look forward to welcoming members to share this enjoyable evening with friends.

As in the past, our Society will provide some meat and cheese platters and deserts. 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. Drinks will be BYO and you may also wish to bring your own glass. Please contact 0419 227 701 if in doubt about what to bring.

There is no formal agenda but as in past years Jim Connor will show some local historical photographs and others from his own collection.

As we acknowledge and celebrate our 50 year anniversary, it is with interest that we look back at that time.

An overall recognition by local communities with their sense of connection with its past was becoming widely apparent. Heidelberg Historical Society and the Doncaster -Templestowe Historical Society were also founded in 1967.

The successful campaign to preserve and relocate Shillinglaw Cottage, (initiated by our First President Charis Pelling and our very own Diana Bassett-Smith) - an immediate precursor to the establishment of our Society had been very successful and the Flavour of Eltham, a local recipe book produced to raise funds for the project continued to be in demand.

A number of other local organisations also share 50th celebrations in 2017:

- The Kangaroo Ground Pony Club was formed in 1967 as was the Eltham Redbacks Football Club (soccer) and Diamond Valley Little Athletics. LaTrobe University, Bundoora opened with 511 enrolments in its first year.
- In 1967, Betty Burstall, though not living in Eltham at the time, founded the La Mama Theatre in Carlton, which became a space for innovative, small-scale productions. It continues to go strong as an independent theatre.
- Housewives considered a shopping trip to the newly opened Northland in Preston, built on 51 acres. It was billed as “the biggest shopping centre you’ve ever seen”.
- The new Eltham Branch library opened following the closure of the Children’s Library, which had been operated for 20 years by the Eltham War Memorial Trust.
- Eltham Little Theatre was nine years young.
- A plane crashed in Christmas Hills killing the pilot, a single father from Doncaster.
- A 60-page report: The Future Growth of Melbourne - A Report to the Minister for Local Government on Melbourne’s Future Growth and its Planning Administration, was prepared by the Board of Works on the development of Melbourne and its ability to cope with an estimated three million more people by the year 2000. The Minister for Local Government, Mr. Hamer, had asked for the board’s views on the future growth of Melbourne and planning policies and administration needed to guide the growth.
- More widely - Eastern Australia was in the middle of a drought and a May referendum had given powers to the Commonwealth to make laws for recognition for Australian Aborigines.
- Ronald Ryan was the last man to be hanged in Australia, a new five dollar note went into circulation, and the Australian postcode system of postal address coding was introduced.
- Our involvement in the Vietnam War continued to divide opinions and the disappearance of Prime Minister Harold Holt, while out swimming in heavy surf near Portsea, is a great shock to all Australians.



The Future Growth of Melbourne Report - 1967

(continued on page 4)

On TV, families settled to watch local shows In Melbourne Tonight with Graham Kennedy and Wide World of Sport on Sunday afternoons. Children's show Adventure Island premiered on the ABC. International favourites included Dr. Who and Star Trek. Popular films for the year included The Graduate, The Jungle Book and Casino Royale, no doubt showing at the local Plaza Cinema or the nearby Preston Drive-in. Johnny Farnham releases his number one hit Sadie the Cleaning Lady and Joan Lindsay's Picnic at Hanging Rock is published. Richmond won the VFL Grand Final against Geelong.

What are your memories of 1967?

Our 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner

We held our 50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner on Friday 27th October 2017, at St Margaret's Church Hall in Pitt Street, Eltham. This was attended by over 80 members and friends, including the Honourable Vicki Ward, State Member for Eltham, Cr. Peter Clarke, Mayor of the Shire of Nillumbik and Associate Professor Don Garden OAM, President of the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, who we welcomed as our guest speaker.

The theme for the evening was 'Remember When' with the format loosely based around a community style dinner of the 1960s and 1970s. It was a very enjoyable evening and we could not have squeezed any more people into the hall.

Our President, Jim Connor, welcomed everyone and acknowledged all members who had actively contributed to the establishment and development of the Society since 1967. A special mention was made of our seven life members who were in attendance.

Many people assisted to ensure this was a successful way to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Eltham District Historical Society, a significant achievement for our organisation.



A full house enjoyed our
50th Anniversary Celebration Dinner
at St Margaret's Church Hall, Eltham

Jim Connor, Russell Yeoman, Harry Gilham,
Sue Law, Mayor Peter Clarke, Diana Bassett-
Smith, Vicki Ward MP

Photographs courtesy of Peter Pidgeon



***We are a keeper of the past, we value and record the present
and look to serve our community into the future***

We arrived in Eltham in December 1949, 3 days before Christmas. My grandmother, my mother, my twin brother Joe and me. We sailed from Tilbury on the P&O S.S Ormonde. There were twelve hundred passengers, a hundred and twenty-eight of them being children. As we did not fall into the migrant category, my mother paid two hundred pounds for the four of us, all the other passengers paid ten. We had the best cabin and it berthed four people. It was a one class ship and everybody, adults and children ate together. There was also a children's playroom, where my mother used to take us so she could spend some quiet time with Granny.

We moved into a white brick house, 16 Taylor Street. My mother was renting it from a pre-war friend, Miss Molly Elder. She had sent us food parcels during the war and sponsored my mother when she thought of immigrating. The house had three bedrooms, a large sitting/dining room, a kitchen, laundry and separate bathroom and lavatory, not a large house but a challenge for my mother who with her mother was unused to housework. Add to that lively twins of six and she had her hands truly full. Although my mother had learned to cook during the war, as most of her servants left to work in factories for much better money, she was not so used to house work, she always had some kind of a maid to do the cleaning and had always had a laundry service.



16 Taylor Street, Eltham - photograph - Ann Constable

My grandmother's one claim to fame was she had once made scrambled eggs during the war, otherwise she had never cooked or done any housework! After the war, we lived in Scotland before we left for Australia and we had a cook, housemaid and two gardeners, also a laundry service for the sheets and towels. At Taylor Street, my poor mother was faced with a copper in the laundry and two troughs, one with a mangle, so she hastily looked around for someone to deal with washing and cleaning.

We had a series of women who proved incompetent. Eventually by 1951 we had found dear Mrs. Osborne who worked so faithfully for us until my mother left Laughing Waters. The next step was to find a gardener, and this was when the fun began. My mother asked Mr. Raines who owned the newsagency if she could put a notice in his window to advertise, but he said the sort of person she was after might possibly have reading difficulties and that sort of thing was best done by word of mouth. He pointed out Jim Cresp and my mother was advised by him (with tongue in cheek) to employ a man called Mick. He had once been in the police force but for some unknown misdemeanour had been expelled so he took to drink and was known throughout Eltham as "Metho Mick", as when he was short of funds, he mixed methylated spirits with his drink.

All this was of course quite unknown to my mother and she employed him in all good faith. He turned up the first morning in a heavy army great coat and was sweating copiously, she took him down to the cellar and showed him the gardening tools and the mowing machine and asked him to start by mowing the front lawn. I was looking out of the sitting room window and watched him as he unsteadily mowed a crooked swathe of lawn and then he suddenly fell down and lay on his back like a cast sheep. I screamed for my mother and we both watched him get up unsteadily and disappear into the cellar. Five minutes later he knocked at the back door and said: "Sorry Missus I'm sick, real sick, touch of the gastrics, I'll hafta go home." "Indeed you will," said my brave mother. "You are not sick but very tipsy, I can smell alcohol on you and I do not want you here ever again." So he lurched off up Taylor Street and fell over once more. Later when my mother went to put the mowing machine back in the cellar she found a half empty bottle of sherry! My brave mother went back to Jim Cresp, and told him what had happened, he apologised profusely and recommended Jacky Bryant, who came to us and stayed until 1959 when we went to Laughing Waters.

A Squatter's Life on the Plenty River at 'Wanstead' The 1837 Diary of James Louis Willis

Anne Paul

The Diary is written by James Louis Willis, an educated young man, fourth son of Richard and Anne Willis of Wanstead Park, Van Diemen's Land. The Diary forms Chapter 8 of the Historical Records of Victoria, Volume 6.

The Diary starts on Sunday 9 April 1837, with brothers Edward and James, aged 20 and 23 years and their Uncle Arthur embarking from Van Diemen's Land with 659 sheep bound for the new frontier of Port Phillip. The sheep are jointly owned by his brothers Edward, Charles and William. They were from stock bred on their father's Wanstead Park Estate in Van Diemen's Land, of Spanish Merino pedigree, presented to King George of England by the King of Spain in 1809.

However rather than a judicious endeavour to expand family fortunes, the Diary reveals a troubled Willis family and sons driven from home by a harsh father, for an apparently contrived offence, with arrogance and ruthlessness being a hallmark of his behaviour.

Squatting on the Plenty

The Willis party arrive at Gellibrand Point (Williamstown) on 13 April 1837. Their shepherds carry the sheep ashore. Uncle Arthur travels to Melbourne, to later return to Van Diemen's Land. By various means the rest of the party and sheep make their way along the northern side of the Yarra River to the Plenty River, arriving on 18 April 1837.

... We pursued its course for three miles and found it to be a permanent stream ... We crossed it and came to our present one (encampment), which although rather thickly timbered we have every reason to be satisfied with. It is bounded in the South and East by the Yarra. The stream I have alluded to forms its western boundary which we call Edward's Rivulet, but I perceive the surveyors have on their charts dignified it by the name of the 'River Plenty'.

They name the site Wanstead after their family home in Van Diemen's Land and build yards and a camp. Across the months of May to mid-July, James records details of their daily activities as squatters, as well as his inner feelings, hopes and frustrations.

On 15 July James writes about their exploration up the Plenty River and when they had

... traversed the course of the Plenty some five or six miles we came upon a tract of most excellent grazing land, which Master Ned thought so much superior to his own run ... that he must return home, ... Ned being determined in his own mind to move to this desirable spot forthwith and without delay...

The Final Entry

The Diary abruptly finishes on August 30 1837. This follows a gap of six weeks, as James has been in Melbourne recovering from illness.

He describes being

... seized with violent and agonising pains in my testicles. I was obliged to keep to my bed, where for three days and three nights I lay in torture, neither able to eat, drink or sleep and at night keeping poor Ned awake with my groans. On the fourth day the doctor arrived, and finding that I was suffering from inflammation caused by cold, he ordered me to be immediately removed to town before he would venture to bleed me.

(continued on page 7)



An Exploring Party Looking for A Sheep Run
AD Lang – 1847 Courtesy State Library Victoria

A Squatter's Life on the Plenty River at 'Wanstead' The 1837 Diary of James Louis Willis

(continued from page 6)

When I returned home about a week ago, I found that Ned had removed his sheep and headquarters to a far more desirable spot about seven miles higher up the 'Plenty' and for the first time we found ourselves in a snug turf hut, eleven feet by thirteen, with a thatched roof and neatly whitewashed inside.

He mentions their brother William ... *whose arrival we are expecting ...*

In the last few lines of his final entry James talks about his likely move to Geelong, in a month, to be in charge of a mercantile store. He finishes by referring to himself as a banished friend, in reflecting on receiving a letter from a friend in Tasmania. And there his Diary ends.



To my knowledge, it is the earliest account of European occupation of the Lower Plenty region, while also providing glimpses of life around early Melbourne.

It is a wonderful resource. It provides a wealth of information on the circumstances, daily endeavours and aspirations of these reluctant squatters. It draws you into the lives of two young men 180 years ago that, on the surface is a stark contrast to the lives of young men in 2017, but as you read on many contemporary parallels emerge, through James' sincere expression of seeking a secure place and happiness in the world.

I used his Diary, along with other sources to support the successful Heritage Victoria Inventory nomination of the original Willis site - Edward Willis Hut and Sheep Run (H7922-0264), near the rear of the Lower Plenty Hotel. Sadly it is now a building development, ironically named Edward Willis Court.

The Diary was reprinted with permission of James' great grandson Dr RW Pearson and we can thank his descendents for preserving his Diary and giving us this detailed insight into his world back in 1837.

A full version of this article and references are available on the Greensborough Historical Society website at <http://www.greensboroughhistorical.org.au/Articles>

A copy of the James Willis Diary is available at <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/4f72bdf097f83e0308606771>

80th Anniversary of Rob Roy Hillclimb

On the 19th November 2017 a large crowd of spectators and competitors celebrated the 80th anniversary of motor sport action at the historic Rob Roy Hillclimb in Clintons Road, Christmas Hills.

When constructed, Rob Roy was one of only three bitumen surfaced purpose built hillclimbs in the world. Its origins go back to 1935, when the then Light Car Club of Australia inspected the Clinton's Pleasure Grounds property with a view to establishing a suitable venue for hillclimb meetings. The first meeting was run in 1937 and the track fully bitumenised in 1939.

www.robroyhillclimb.com.



Photographs by Jim Connor

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