



# Newsletter

No. 238 February 2018

## 2018 Nillumbik Community Group of the Year Award to the Eltham District Historical Society

At the Australia Day ceremony on 26th January 2018, held by Nillumbik Shire Council at the Eltham Community and Reception Centre, it was announced that the Eltham District Historical Society has received the **2018 Nillumbik Community Group of the Year Award**.

We feel this valued award is an appreciated recognition of the commitment and contributions of current and past members of our society over many years.

It is fitting to receive this award in our 50th anniversary year and encourages our society to continue engaging and supporting the interests of our community, in our local history.



EDHS members with Cr. Peter Clarke, Mayor of Nillumbik after receiving the award

The **2018 Nillumbik Community Group of the Year Award** was presented by Cr. Peter Clarke, Mayor of Nillumbik to our president Jim Connor, who received it on behalf of all our past and present members. The enjoyment of receiving this award was shared by many members who attended this Australia Day ceremony.

### Next Meeting

8.00pm Wednesday 14th February 2018

Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre

Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)

### Heritage Excursion

Eltham Cemetery Artworks

2.00pm Saturday 3rd March 2018

*See further details on page 2*

## February Meeting

All are welcome to come along to our first meeting of the year on Wednesday, 14th February 2018 at 8:00 pm at the Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre and our 303rd meeting since the Shire of Eltham Historical Society was formally established in October 1967.

Through the magic of Historypin we plan to travel back in time, 50 years to February 1968. Big changes to the Eltham township were afoot with the pending duplication of Main Road.

**historypin**

A series of approximately 50 photos were taken in February 1968 by an unknown person of the section of Main Road planned for duplication, commencing at Pitt Street and travelling towards Research through the shopping centre, finishing at Elsa Court.



Corner of Main Road and Luck Street, Eltham 1968

Photograph - EDHS collection

These images now form one of our showcase collections on Historypin, an online tool which combines with Google Street View to transition between views from 'Then' and 'Now'.

At our meeting we will introduce this Historypin collection and view a number of the key images.

The intention for this meeting is to provide the opportunity for two-way discussions; so comments, personal recollections and corrections are most welcome, as we take a Valentine Day's walk down Main Road together.

## March Excursion - Eltham Cemetery Artworks

Newsletter No 236 October 2017 contained a report on the unveiling of a significant new art project at the Eltham Cemetery. Titled "Our Eltham – Artistic Recollections" it features 31 ceramic panels containing artwork with a local history theme. The work is the joint creation of artist Nerina Lascelles and ceramicist Linda Detoma, supported with stonework by Leigh Wykes and steelwork by Neil Carter, all skilled local Nillumbik artisans.

The main purpose of our excursion on Saturday 3rd March 2018 at 2.00pm will be to view the panels and will include readings from the interpretive booklet published by the Cemetery Trust. There will also be the opportunity to inspect other artworks within the cemetery.

Enter the cemetery from Metery Road (Melway Ref. 21 K9) and proceed to the adjacent car park. This excursion is free and is open to the general public as well as Society members. Please note that dogs are not permitted on Society excursions. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.



"Our Eltham – Artistic Recollections"

Photographs - Jim Connor



In 1952 my mother bought the house we were renting at 16 Taylor Street and also the next door block at number 18. In 1957 she bought number 14 and Gordon Ford designed a garden to include and co-ordinate the three blocks. The house was named “Laggan” after one of the farms on my grandmother’s estate in Scotland, it was Gaelic and meant “The cry of the wild geese.”

Gordon Ford drove an old car with wide running boards and he let my brother Joe and myself ride on them. He had two golden cocker spaniels, Casey and Honey who went everywhere with him. Number 14 was a paddock with a great pile of blackberries in the middle. Gordon removed the blackberries, mowed the paddock and then bought lots of Australian native trees to plant there. These trees came from a native nursery in the village owned by old Mervyn Skipper. Our gardener Jacky Bryant was very jealous of Gordon and resented him working for my mother. With native plants and Gordon’s “signature” mossy boulders our garden was rather beautiful.

The drive spanned 16 and 18, with a gate at each end and at the bottom of 14 my mother had a garage built. Whilst to begin with, number 16 had back and front lawns and flower beds, number 18 was a grassy paddock with an enormous willow tree, the roots of which got into our drains. The first thing my mother did was have the tree removed and then she had the top of the paddock ploughed over for a vegetable garden and smoothed out for a play house for us and a hen house. The bottom of the block was ploughed and then grass sown for a lawn. Mr. Mapperson and his two enormous draught horses Punch and Blossom came to plough the paddock. They were lovely gentle horses, with big, hairy ankles and hoofs larger than dinner plates. I was allowed to pat their noses and had to stand on tiptoe to do this, whilst they bent their great heads down.



Ann Vaughan Johnson with Chips the cocker spaniel  
Photograph supplied by Ann Constable (nee Vaughan Johnson)

My grandmother died in 1955 and then my mother was able to transfer her money from London where it was being looked after by the trustees of my grandfather’s will, the merchant bank of Coutts and Co. in the Strand. The money had been invested in war loans at 3%, so my mother was glad to get her money out here and invest it more profitably. One of the first things she did was to buy a car, a Morris Isis.

Our house had an enormous glass window in the sitting room and we could see Main Road, past the plumber Ray Walker’s and right up to the Kinglake hills. Taylor Street was a dirt road and named after Miss Taylor who actually lived in Bible Street. She was a dreadful old gossip and I believe was still alive when we moved to Laughing Water Road in 1959.

Every Guy Fawkes night she would have an enormous bonfire in her paddock on the corner of Henry and Bible Streets. Everybody bought fireworks; ‘penny bungers’, ‘jumping jacks’ and Catherine wheels to be nailed to gum trees. Older boys bought rockets and set them off in beer bottles. We had to watch from our large front window, because neither Mum nor Granny would dream of going and if we went by ourselves “Goodness knows who we’d talk to.”

Then Joe joined the First Eltham Cubs and they all attended this bonfire annually and bliss, oh bliss I was allowed to go with him.

*What is coal used for? How are the seasons caused?  
What was the amount of the national debt at the  
close of William's reign?*

In 1890, these were some of the questions which William Shillinglaw had to answer for homework. We know this because his homework book (the exercise book in which he did his homework assignments) has survived. It was provided to the Eltham District Historical Society (EDHS) by Margaret Ball (former EDHS vice-president) who is a grand-daughter of William's sister Florence.

William (known as Willie) was born in October 1877 and started in grade 1 at Eltham State School in April 1882. William's sister Caroline (19 months older than William) started on the same day. Both William and Caroline progressed through to grade 6 and left school in September 1890. (It was not uncommon for children to spend two years in the same grade. This was particularly so in 1888-89 when no school examinations were held, probably due to the ill health and retirement of head teacher David Clark.) Seven other Shillinglaw children (younger than William) also attended Eltham State School. Elizabeth, Mary, Florence, Ernest and Ada all completed their schooling, but Susan and Alfred both died in May 1888 whilst in grade 1.

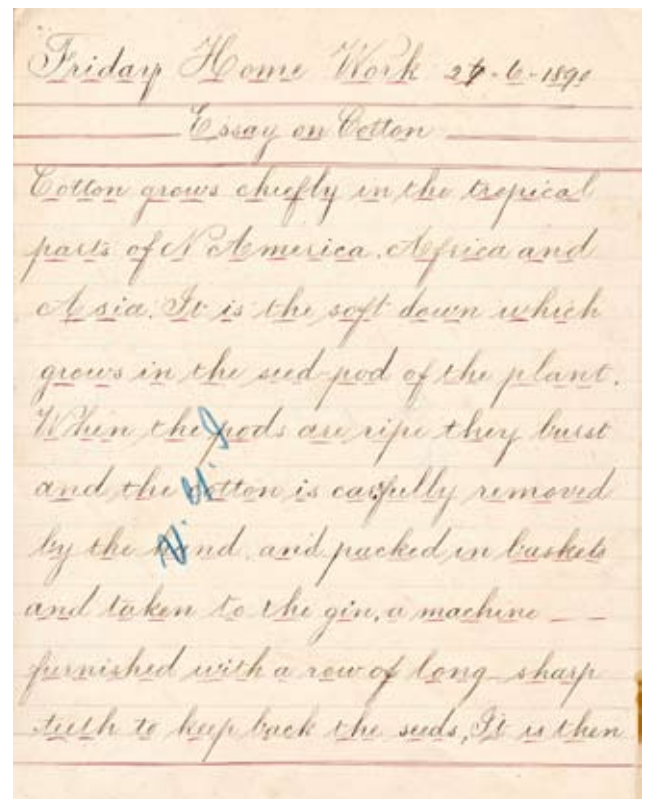
On Sundays, William and Caroline attended the Eltham Primitive Methodist Sabbath School (on the south-west corner of Susan and Bridge Streets). In 1886 they were jointly awarded a book prize (to be shared equally between the two of them) for "second best attendance at Sabbath School", and William was presented with another book award in 1887, though this time the inscription doesn't state the reason for the award.

- *What is paraffin?*
- *If 12 men took 8 days of 9 hours each to clear a field, how long would 15 men take working 7½ hours a day?*
- *Name the Tudor sovereigns?*

The homework book covers a two-month period from mid-June to mid-August 1890. Homework was given on most days, generally consisting of a few questions requiring only brief answers. Subjects covered were grammar, arithmetic, history, geography and natural science. The exercises all seem to be indicative of rote learning, with little evidence of any creative ability being elicited. Other subjects taught would have included reading, writing, spelling and (for girls) needlework.



William Shillinglaw Homework Book  
Photograph - EDHS Collection



William Shillinglaw Homework Book  
Photograph - EDHS Collection



The most noticeable thing about the homework book from a modern perspective is the beautiful copperplate handwriting and the general neatness, though there are some doodlings on the first few pages. There are no ink blots and hardly any crossings-out. The book includes the teacher's tick marks and occasional corrections. There are also gradings. Mostly, William received a "good" or "very good" for his work; one is "very good indeed" (if I am reading the teacher's writing correctly).

A loose page inserted in the book contains two hand-drawn maps, one signed by William's sister Elizabeth, the other unsigned but possibly also by Elizabeth. The last few pages of the book contain some transcription (writing) exercises, definitely in William's hand, but bearing dates in December 1890 and June 1891. This is something of a mystery as William left school in September 1890. Maybe he was coaching one of his younger brothers or sisters.

Sadly, William did not have the opportunity to put his learning to use. He died from rheumatic fever in July 1891, aged 13.



William Shillinglaw Homework Book  
Photograph - EDHS Collection

## Early Eltham Shire boundaries

Russell Yeoman

The original Eltham Road District extended beyond Healesville and in fact included all of the area between the Yarra River and the Great Dividing Range right up to the source of the river.

However on creation of the Shire of Eltham in 1871 it extended only as far as the Watts River and so did not include the main part of Healesville or Coranderrk. An area east of Yarra Glen was severed in 1912 and a further area generally east of Watsons Creek and Skyline Road was severed in 1958.

## Population of the township of Eltham:

101 Years ago (1917) 400  
71 years ago (1947) 7,000  
64 years ago (1954) 11,500  
12 years ago (2006) 17,581  
3 years ago (2015) 23,411



## Wanted - a Treasurer

*The Eltham District Historical Society would like to hear from anyone who could assist our society in the role of Treasurer/Membership Secretary.*

*We appreciate the contributions David Johns has made in this position for many years. He has now decided not to continue.*

*The Treasurer is a member of our executive committee and maintains records of our revenue, expenditure and membership. EDHS uses Microsoft Excel for these purposes.*

*We would be pleased to hear from any member who would be interested in discussing this role.*

*You can contact our president Jim Connor – Telephone 0418 379 497 or [edhshistory@gmail.com](mailto:edhshistory@gmail.com)*

My father was Bernie Smith, who purchased a property in Eltham because it best fitted his selection criteria of having a hill on which he could build his house and a creek at the bottom that would secure the water supply. He named the property "Nerreman Park", which is derived from an aboriginal word meaning "River Bend". Originally, Nerreman Park consisted of a hilly, undeveloped 24 acres of land between Bolton Street (now Ryans Rd) and Karingal Drive in the (then) Shire of Eltham and it was purchased for 220 pounds on 28 March 1940.

Dad was an Electrical Engineer who practiced in the Partnership of B A & D B Smith, a firm of Consulting Engineers providing services to many Victorian country town water supply trusts and sewerage authorities from 1885 to 1978.

The first improvement on his land was a concrete arched dam across the creek, which was designed and built by Dad in accordance with the theory of his father, (Bernhard Alexander Smith). In 1920, my grandfather was awarded the American Society of Civil Engineers' - "J. James R. Croes Gold Medal" for his Technical Paper entitled "Arched Dams". It was the first time this medal had been awarded outside of America.



D.B Smith dam - Nerreman Park  
Photograph - Jim Connor

The most widely recognised example of my grandfather's work is the Hoover Dam, near Las Vegas in the USA, which was dedicated by President Roosevelt on 30 September 1935. Then the world's biggest dam and taking five years to construct, it stretches about 380m across the Colorado River in Black Canyon.

Building materials were very scarce because of WW2 and construction of the house at Nerreman Park was not commenced until 1946. It was structurally finished about 1959 and finally fitted-out in the early 1960s. Following construction of the dam, a power-house and pumping station was built which measured about 6m x 4.5m. Although this was full of machinery and pipework, it was nevertheless where I lived with Dad, Mum and my brother Douglas for some years.



J. James R. Croes Gold Medal  
Photograph -Alex Smith

As my father had no appetite for borrowing money, the Nerreman Homestead was built in three stages as my parents could afford to do it. Stage 1 consisted of a garage, lounge room (later the laundry), kitchen, toilet and bathroom. Initially the four of us slept in the garage until the Stage 2 bedrooms and study came along. Stage 3 was the permanent lounge room of 15 imperial squares.

The house overlooks Ryans Road to Eltham in the east and is a 'slab-off-ground', flat-roof, concrete and stone structure, completely designed and built by both of my parents. The stone was quarried from the property by two draught horses, (Mr. Mapperson's Punch and Blossom), and the concrete hand-mixed in a small electrically operated mixer. The wooden planked formwork was about 2m long x 1m high and separated by a conduited bolting arrangement.

My mother Isa was a triple certificate nurse at the old St Andrews Hospital in charge of the operating theatre, having been trained at the Swan Hill Hospital. So that she could furnish her new home, Mum attended Prahran Technical School in the 1950s to learn upholstery.

## My Early Eltham Recollections – Part 1

(continued from page 6)

In those early days, Eltham was a small village. When he was not in country Victoria, my father commuted to Flinders Street by train and then walked to his office at 440 Little Collins Street. The train would stop at Bolton Street (between the Eltham and Montmorency Stations) for pick-up and drop-off.

Mum and Dad were married in St Peter's Chapel, Melbourne Grammar School on 10 January 1942. I was born in 1944 and have lived at Nerreman Park my whole life. My brother Douglas was born in 1945 and our schooling was at Ivanhoe Grammar and later at Melbourne Grammar.

When we started school at Ivanhoe Grammar my mother would take us to and from school on the train every weekday. This required her to traverse the Diamond Street hill twice daily at a time when this road was little more than a very steep goat track. When we first attended Melbourne Grammar she entrusted us to Tommy Caulfield, who looked after us in the Guard's van of the Red-Rattler trains.

### Smith Family Details

Father – Douglas Bernhard (Bernie) SMITH : 01 May 1901 - 23 Dec 1983 : [DBS]

Mother – Isobel Mary Florence Bernhard (Isa) SMITH (nee Kimberley) : 18 Apr 1906 - 14 Feb 1996 : [IBS]

Son – Alexander Bernhard SMITH : 31 Aug 1944 - : [Tid]

Son – Douglas Bernhard SMITH : 06 Oct 1945 - : [Doug]

## Members On-line Survey - December 2017

Thank you to all members who completed our online survey during December 2017, we appreciate you taking time to provide your feedback. We undertook this survey as part of reviewing our operations in our 50th anniversary year.

The information we obtained across a number of areas will help our committee to refine our strategic approach for our society over the next few years. Overall we were pleased to receive encouraging comments about the services we provide, as well as a number of worthwhile suggestions we can consider.

For your information, this diagram illustrates responses to the question 'What do you enjoy about being part of our society?'

Thanks also to members who have indicated they may be able to volunteer their time and skills to assist us, we will be in contact with you.

As we are a volunteer based not for profit society we welcome any offers of practical assistance, sponsorship or financial support to help us continue maintaining our role of preserving and promoting our local history.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held in April so members may wish to consider nominating for our committee as a way of contributing to our ongoing operations.





During the 1970's Michael and I were considering buying a property in Catani Boulevard at the Bend of Islands. We soon became aware of a conservationist and artist living nearby. We visited Neil Douglas and Abbie Heatchcote's mud brick house and were surprised it was possible to live in the bush in such an inspirational way. We were struck by a bathtub set level to a large window overlooking the wonderful native bushland and were told that whilst having a bath one could observe the wallabies. Neil talked enthusiastically about their lifestyle as he showed us around.

Neil Douglas was born in 1911 and in his early life he studied painting at the National Gallery School, Melbourne. He joined the Boyds and other artists at the Arthur Merric Boyd (AMB) Pottery at Murrumbidgee and used his skills to decorate many of the ceramics. The National Gallery of Victoria has acquired a number of his pieces, one being his Kangaroo Platter c1950.

Neil resumed painting when he moved to Research where he lived for a period with his wife and three children. Various people also lived at this property and there was a community feel about it. There was no electricity, running water or alcohol. Hilary Jackman has written of his assistance in revealing to her the colour and texture of the local bush at this time.

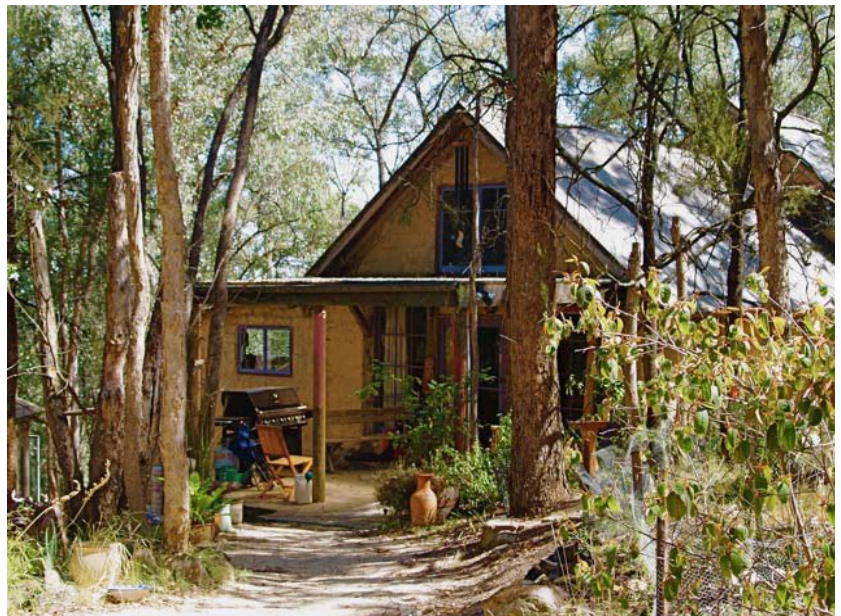


Kangaroo Platter c1950  
Photograph - National Gallery of Victoria

In 1964 he moved to the Bend of Islands between Christmas Hills and Kangaroo Ground with his partner Abbie Heathcote. He had bought the ten acre block of hillside red box bush for \$3000 with the \$200 deposit, gained by selling a painting. Abbie built a mudbrick house for them both and grew vegetables and herbs. The soil was clay so they terraced it with rocks. Chook and goat manure provided fertilisation. Visitors brought worms. Neil was a passionate and persuasive leader as well as an artist and gardener.

Abbey was a builder, weaver, spinner, painter and writer. Although dogs and cats were not accepted, goats were kept to provide milk and cheese as well as chickens for eggs.

In the 1968 bushfires sixty-two houses were burnt but their house survived as Neil believed it was partly due to the wattles rather than gumtrees close to his house. He promoted a passion for our natural environment and was prepared to speak out on these issues. The Co-op (Round the Bend Cooperative at the Bend of Islands) succeeded largely due to him.



Abbie and Neil's house at the Bend of Islands  
Photograph - greenconnections.wordpress.com

This early effort of their version of sustainable living developed into the Environmental Living Zone.

Later in life he moved to Nhill in country Victoria where he continued to paint in the bush.

*(continued on page 9)*



In 1975 Neil Douglas was awarded an MBE in recognition of his services to conservation and the arts. The occasion was described by Phillip Jones in an obituary in The Age in 2003 after Neil's death as follows:

'On October 1, 1975, 63 distinguished citizens of the State of Victoria foregathered, each to receive an imperial honour...the male recipients, mostly sportsmen - including footballer Keith Greig and cricketer Ian Redpath donned neat blue suits... The odd man out was Neil Douglas. This much loved environmental artist wore a hessian suit he had woven, dyed and tailored himself. To add insult to injury he was shoeless. His hair (which he claimed, had not been cut for 20 years) and his beard almost obscured his quizzical, rosy, bony face...His contribution to our Australian civilisation was, arguably, greater than any other of the Queen's chosen few at Government house that day.'

## News Of Eltham England

Russell Yeoman

Twenty years ago Margaret Taylor and Clifford Crate from Eltham, England visited our Eltham. Each was a former chairman of the Eltham Society, which is the equivalent of our historical society over there.

Since that time Margaret has maintained regular contact, mainly by way of cards or letters at Christmas. Her card this year sent Christmas greetings to our members and included some news from Eltham as follows:

*'Our Eltham High Street has had a long drawn out "makeover" during 2017. The Borough Council has re-laid all pavements and updated pedestrian crossings (needed) but has added expensive and pointless wooden 6 ft letters spelling ELTHAM (illuminated at night) and stone letters outside the church. We'd rather the money had been spent on renewing/re-opening the public toilets!!*

*There are many seats on our pavements labelled for "celebrities" with Eltham connections. We have proper "historical ones" like Prince John born at Eltham Palace 1316 and Thomas Dogget founder of rowing race 1715, alongside persons who recently played football for Charlton or appeared on TV a few times.*

*The Council apparently took the names from a tentative list John Webb of the "SE9" magazine had made to remind himself of people he might write an article about. They neither consulted him nor the Eltham Society as to who was "worthy" of a bench! By next year Eltham should have a CINEMA in the High Street again. It's a big hole at present.'*

Since her visit here Margaret has maintained a strong interest in St Margaret's Church, in Pitt Street, Eltham. Parish Historian Geoff Sandy has generously provided copies of the three volumes of his history of the church for Margaret and The Eltham Society.



Eltham High Street - c1988  
Photograph - The Eltham Society



Eltham High Street - 2018  
Photograph - Google Streetview



The Eltham High Street sign  
Photograph - Google Streetview

## Webster Survey Group

The Eltham District Historical Society appreciates the sponsorship of the **Webster Survey Group**.



webstergroup.com.au (03) 9439 4222

Land Surveying is the foundation of the Webster Survey Group and they can contribute to any project, whether large or small and provide the most suitable practices in order to satisfy a client's requirements.

The history of changes in land ownership and layout are recorded by land surveyors. In this way the Webster Group have been documenting our local history for many years.

### Please support our sponsors - they support our Society

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### ....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 2015-2016 financial year, which will be applied toward the operating costs of our Local History Centre. We are grateful to the Council for its support.

### Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

- Jim Connor, President – Telephone 0418 379 497 – [edhshistory@gmail.com](mailto:edhshistory@gmail.com)
- Russell Yeoman, Society Secretary – Telephone 9439 9717 – [edhsoffice@gmail.com](mailto:edhsoffice@gmail.com)
- David Johns, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Telephone 9434 3357

We appreciate the financial support provided by  
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*Printed by courtesy of Vicki Ward, State Member for Eltham*