

# Newsletter



No. 239 April 2018

## Every Place has a History

Jim Connor

One definition of the word 'History' is:

*'the whole series of past events connected with a particular person or thing'.*

We all own our slice of history from when we are born.

The disastrous fire that destroyed the popular Eltham North Reserve Adventure Playground, in the early hours of Saturday 16th December 2017, has reinforced how important and valued a 'thing' such as a playground is to an individual's personal history.

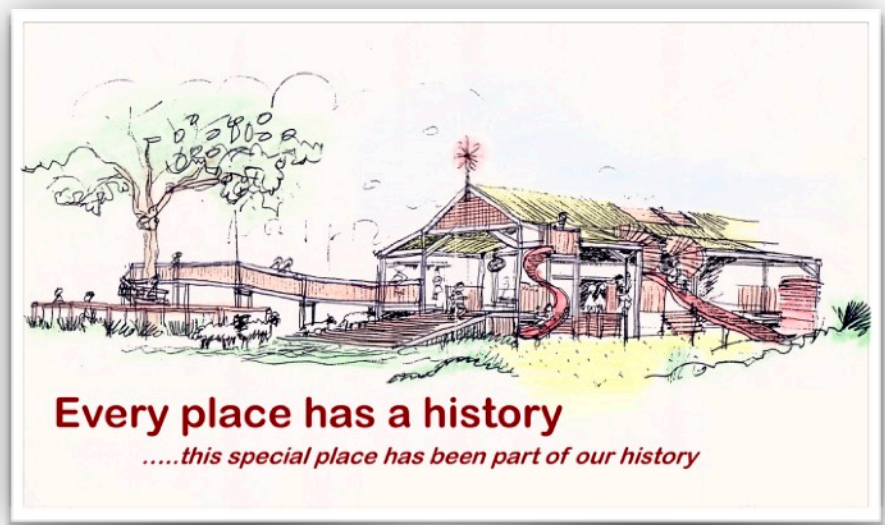
The outpouring of sadness and grief by young and older children and adults following this devastating loss has clearly shown this playground to be an inherent part of the history and memory of many people, of many families, both from the local area and well beyond. Though only less than 25 years old this playground has a significant history.

Since the fire the Eltham District Historical Society has been able to attend on site gatherings to display early plans, photographs and details of this playground, that was funded and built by active community efforts and opened in September 1994.

This process has highlighted we are all part of our local history and that even recent events and activities contribute to this history.

Whilst located in the Shire of Diamond Valley when opened, the Eltham North Reserve and this Adventure Playground became part of the Shire of Nillumbik when municipal restructure occurred in December 1994.

The intended development of a replacement playground and environs will add to this ongoing story and will again provide a wonderful space for the community to enjoy.



This image uses an original perspective drawing of the Eltham North Adventure Playground designed by Traditional Cedar Barns in conjunction with Paul Gardiner Architect

## Annual General Meeting

8.00pm Wednesday 11th April 2018

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre.

Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)

## Heritage Excursion

Edendale Environs

2.00pm Saturday 5th May 2018

See further details on page 2

## Annual General Meeting - 11th April 2018

Our next meeting on Wednesday 11th April 2018 at 8.00pm will be 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 Agenda are on page 9 in this Newsletter.

It will be held at our usual meeting venue, the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place Eltham. Members and guests are welcome to attend.

At this meeting we are pleased to be able to show a film of the early activities of the Briar Hill Timber and Trading Company, in Sherbourne Road, Briar Hill. This film details the various operations involved in this business during the 1950s/60s, from sourcing trees from the forest, to machining the timber and then manufacturing various building materials and components.



Briar Hill Timber and Trading - c 2000  
Photograph by Doug Orford - EDHS collection

A copy of this film has been generously donated to our Society by Bob Manuell, who was an active part of this family owned business, established by his mother-in-law Mrs Hazel Squire. We are fortunate that Bob has agreed to attend our meeting to add his comments and insights about some of the scenes shown.

Bob Manuell was a former Shire President and Councillor at the Shire of Eltham, from 1980 until 1994, when following municipal restructure the Shire ceased upon the establishment of the Shire of Nillumbik. Bob's father-in law Fred Squire was also a former Eltham Shire President and Councillor, having served between 1945 and 1953.

## May Excursion – Edendale Environs

Edendale Community Environment Farm in Gastons Road, Eltham now operates as Nillumbik Council's environmental centre. The historic homestead has undergone a significant restoration and there is on-going development of the site consistent with its community education purpose. The house and the gateway sculpture "The Fences Act" are covered by a Heritage Overlay in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme.

Our May excursion will comprise a walk through the farm property and will radiate to other nearby places of historic interest. These will include the site of the Eltham North Adventure Playground to discuss its history and destruction by fire (see page 1 article). Also nearby is Colemans Corner where the early road system has undergone some unusual changes. If time permits we may visit some other nearby places of interest.

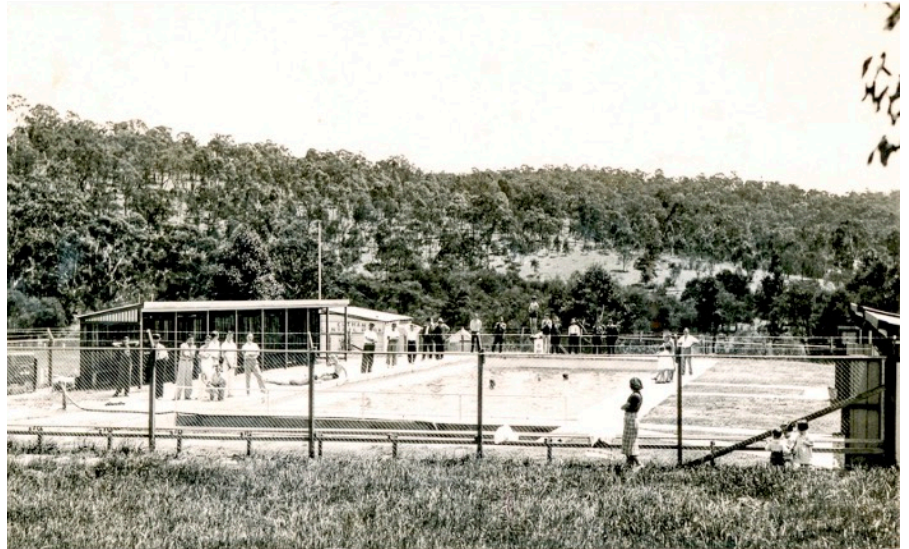


'The Fences Act' gateway sculpture  
Photograph by Jim Connor - EDHS collection

This short walk on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> May will take 2 to 2.5 hours. It will start at 2pm at the car park of the Eltham North Reserve accessed off Wattletree Road, opposite the Eltham North School (Melway ref 21 K 1). This free walk is open to the general public as well as Society members. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions. Contact phone number on the day is 0409 021 063.

Taylor Street was as I have mentioned, unmade and was still in that condition when we left in 1959, it ran from Bible Street, joined Henry Street, which in turn then ran beside the Catholic School and Church and continued over the Main Road, down under the railway bridge to Eltham Central Park and the dirty old swimming baths. The water in these baths was changed every Monday, so by Sunday they were fairly unsanitary! Chlorination was unheard of in those days. Illnesses such as impetigo (or school sores as it was known) red eye and ear infections were all blamed on the water in this swimming pool, some with justification, but it not stop the people of Eltham swimming there.

There were two pools, the large one was 25 yards long and went from 3 feet to 6 feet with a diving board at the deep end. The small one was about 10 feet long and very shallow with wide steps for the smaller children. We would walk to the pool, down Henry Street, cross the Main Road and then there was a paddock with a well-worn track that we walked



Old Eltham Swimming Pool - Central Park  
Photograph from the EDHS Collection

along crossing over the railway lines and there we were. To the north of the paddock towards Eltham village was Shillinglaw Cottage. When I was about thirteen I knocked on the door selling raffle tickets and met two old ladies who told me they had seen Anna Pavlova dance in London.

Two very bad things my brother and I did concerning the railway line, was firstly to walk over the railway bridge on the tracks and as we never knew when the train was coming it was highly dangerous. There were two little cages each side of the lines on the bridge for the workers in case they were caught on the bridge when a train was coming. One terrifying time when I was about ten, I had to shelter covering with my hands over my ears in one of these cages, as a 'red rattler' roared into Eltham station. We never walked over the bridge again.

The second bad thing we did concerning the railway line was to put halfpennies on the rail and when the train went over the halfpennies were squashed to twice their normal size and we tried to pass them off as pennies at the milk bar. Alas, this never worked and we had the age-old threat of "I'll tell your mother, I know who you are, you're the English twins", from the enraged milk bar owner. I have to add that my mother had no idea at the time about either of these incidents, we told her many years later.

One person who must be mentioned was Arthur Munday. He would come up the next door paddock (later to be added to our place as 14 Taylor Street) in an old van and sell vegetables from the open back. He had a huge scale where he measured the weight of his produce and always wore a leather apron. My mother made fast friends with him and brought him into the house to meet Granny and soon he would come later in the day so he could have a sherry with Granny. He was very well educated and had been a solicitor, but he gave all that up, to live at "Montsalvat", otherwise known as 'The Artist's Colony' and had a daughter with Sonia Skipper who was called Saskia. She was several years older than I was and I admired her greatly.

*(continued on page 5)*

### "NOTES FOR BOYS by DONALD MACDONALD. BLACKBERRY GATHERING

*Herbert Woodfield advises an inquirer about blackberries to try Eltham. It is within easy reach of Melbourne, and if visitors go under the railway bridge and along the bank they will find blackberries in abundance."*

That was in 1915. The railway bridge across the Diamond Creek at Eltham, commonly known as the Eltham Trestle Bridge, was constructed in 1901-02. It is now the only timber trestle bridge still in use on Melbourne's electrified railway network. Strictly speaking, it's a timber and steel bridge: it includes sixteen steel beams shipped from New York. In its early days, it was also used as an unofficial footbridge. In 1914, residents west of the creek requested that a proper footway be constructed beside the railway bridge, but this request was officially rejected in 1923.

There were a few accidents and near-misses. In 1931, a man standing on the bridge was fatally electrocuted when he held a metal pole up to the overhead electric wiring. A later report stated he had escaped from Mont Park Asylum. In 1935, a young child playing on the bridge started to run when he saw a train approaching, but tripped and was forced to jump off. He received only a slight cut to his forehead. In 1947, a woman crossing the bridge was struck by a train and thrown from the bridge. She suffered several fractures and was taken to hospital in a critical condition.

It could be argued that not much of the original bridge still exists. All of the timber has progressively been replaced as part of a continuous maintenance programme. This was the responsibility of a railway bridge ganger, who was the foreman of a gang of 4-6 workmen, typically working for four months a year. They operated from a shed located in the goods yard at Eltham Station. The last Eltham-based bridge ganger is believed to have been Jack Bromley in the late 1970s. After then, the work was outsourced to private contractors. The Puffing Billy Preservation Society held the contract in 2001.



'Red Rattler' on Eltham Trestle Bridge

Photograph from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Collection

In 1976, there was much public concern when Victorian Railways began earthworks under the bridge. It transpired that this was a hare-brained scheme to replace the trestle bridge with a huge earth embankment, underneath which the Diamond Creek would flow through four corrugated steel pipes. There had been no public consultation; the public had been "told" of the project three weeks before it started. When the question of a council permit was raised, Victorian Railways arrogantly claimed that no such permit was required as the work was on railway-owned land. Not so! Although the bridge was on railway land, the engineering work for the piping of the creek would have extended well into Council land and even private land. A Council delegation (at a meeting with Victorian Railways) raised three major objections: (1) piping the creek could exacerbate flood inundation (2) the park landscape would be destroyed by the unsightly earth barrier blocking views and access (3) the stream landscape would be destroyed. In his summary, Eltham Shire planner Russell Yeoman said that "the major physical changes to the environment of the area will occur outside the land controlled by the Railways Department".

*(continued on page 5)*

## Eltham Trestle Bridge

*(continued from page 4)*

However, the underlying reason for the public outcry may have been something subtler. Far from being just a part of the railway infrastructure, by 1976 the bridge had become respected in its own right as a tangible reminder of Eltham's history and the influx of artists to Eltham had aroused an appreciation of both the natural and the man-made environment. Renowned local Alistair Knox said that abolishing the trestle bridge would ruin the character of the area. He described the bridge as "one of the best of its type in the world".

In 1998, the National Trust classified the Eltham Railway Bridge (the Trestle Bridge) on its Heritage Register. The lengthy citation stated that it was "historically, scientifically, aesthetically and socially significant at State level" and "a unique and invaluable historical relic of an earlier steam locomotive transport era in the Diamond Creek Valley". It noted that "large manna gum and candle bark trees adorn the adjacent creek banks".



Eltham Trestle Bridge

Photograph from the EDHS collection

In 2017, the bridge's future again came under threat when the State Government announced that it would consider duplicating the railway line. Responding to public opinion, Nillumbik Mayor Peter Clark and Eltham State Labor MP Vicki Ward made representations to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, seeking an assurance that any duplication works would not compromise the historical significance of the existing bridge. Upper House Opposition Leader Mary Wooldridge raised a similar question in Parliament. To date, no such assurance has been forthcoming.

But for now, the bridge still looks pretty much as it did in 1902 and there are still manna gums and candle barks nearby (though blackberry gatherers may be disappointed).

(Sources: The Argus 16/2/1915, 24/1/1947; Evelyn Observer 7/8/1914; Hurstbridge Advertiser 20/11/1931, 8/11/1935; The Herald circa October 1976; Diamond Valley News 27/9/2017; flyer advertising a public meeting and rally in October 1976; National Trust citation 10/11/1998; note by Richard Schurmann in EDHS Newsletter no.138, May 2001; research notes compiled by Harry Gilham; submissions prepared by Russell Yeoman 18/11/1976 and Jim Connor 20/9/2017.)

## Eltham 1950s – Childhood Reminiscences – Part 3

*(continued from page 3)*

My mother enquired from him about schooling for us and he recommended Research Primary School run by a couple called Brandon. Saskia had been there and her two younger cousins from Montsalvat, Seb(astian) and Sig(mund) Jorgensen currently attended. So we went up to Research on a bus, had an interview with the Brandon's and were duly accepted to start the school year in Grade 3.

This friendship with Arthur Munday also led to us having riding lessons with Helen Skipper (who was Seb and Sig's mother). We had nothing but kindness from all the people at Montsalvat and one time when we were nine and Granny was in St Andrew's Hospital, my mother had arranged for us to stay on after our riding lesson and have lunch there so she could visit Granny. We had lunch in their 'Great Hall' and Mr. Jorgensen lifted me up into the big carver chair at the head of the table, I was thrilled to bits.

Outside the door to the Great Hall there was a sulphur crested cockatoo in a cage and he had learned to call out, imitating Mrs. Skipper's voice: "Telephone Helen, telephone" which proved very frustrating for poor Helen, as most were false alarms!

Construction of the Nerreman Homestead first commenced in August 1944 and we moved from the pump house to the top of the hill when I was about 3 or 4. My brother Douglas was born in October 1945 and I think we then had to stay with Dad's mother at 62 Rose Street Armadale, because the pump house was too small for four people. When the three of us were at the pump house I had to sleep outside under the eaves. There is an entry in my Father's diary for 31st January 1947, which states: "Eltham Shire Building Permit (1 pound) and Eltham Shire Septic Tank (5 shillings)." To reach our new home we had a long driveway up from Bolton Street (now Ryan's Road), which bifurcated before it reached the house; the right hand side leading to the front door and left to the back door and garage. This drive was lined by blue and white agapanthus. It was a long, hot walk up to the house after school for two little boys and my far-thinking father had installed a roof-top tank, so there was always water to drink. In 1950s Eltham there was no MMBW water on hot days for houses on a hill, so people ran their baths full of water in the morning and used it for washing, drinking and cooking throughout the day.

Our telephone was connected early on and we even had one in the pump house. Our phone number was originally 135 ,later JL 135, then JL 9135. Our hot water was generated by a wood-fired (sometimes briquettes) Wellstood Slow Combustion Stove, on which my mother also cooked.

Life was quite spartan at Nerreman Park in the 50's. My job before and after school was to milk the house cow. My poor mother had to do the family wash in a wood-fired outside copper, the clothes were then hung on a make-shift line strung between two trees. As well as the cow and our ponies we had some hens. Dad always wanted chicken for Sunday dinner so my mother would kill the hen and sometimes, to the great glee of Douglas and myself, we watched a headless body career around. Mum would then pluck and truss the chook herself. Dad also always wanted chips with his chicken and a close family friend remembers (in the 60's) him calling out: "Chippies, Mummy, chippies." The grass immediately around the house was maintained by Mum, firstly with a push mower, then the luxury of a Victa and finally, a ride-on Deutscher mower in the early 1960's.

There were however always some compensations and one of these was the Pony Club. The Eltham District Horse and Pony Club was established in 1953 and our family were foundation members. Dad was the Treasurer between 1953 and 1964 (12 yrs). Mum served as the District Commissioner in 1958 and I was Treasurer from 1965 to 1971. My first pony was Dandy, who we hired from Fry's Riding School on the corner of Bible and Pitt Streets. They eventually sold up and offered the one eyed Dandy to Dad for ten pounds. As far as I was concerned, that was the best ten quid Dad ever spent. Going to Pony Club, I would jump over the post and rail fences around Hill's dairy farm where Bunnings is now sited. Mr. Hill owned land down to the Diamond Creek and on the other side of the creek up to the cutting on Main Road was the Eltham Shire Tip. Show Jumping became my sport of choice and I competed at regional agricultural shows along with the Melbourne and Adelaide Royal Shows.

**Eltham District Horse and Pony Club - First Trail Ride, December 1953**



Left to right - Andrew Donald, David Bell, Alex Smith, Jenny McMahon, Fay Hardess, Chrissy McLean, Jane Kimber, Barry Hardess, Sue Haseltine, Sue Donald, Helen Rank, Elizabeth Thomas, Margot Donald, Christine Cuscaden, Diana Lewis, Erif Reseigh, Stephen Harris, Doug Smith, Diana Bassett-Smith

My mother meanwhile was involved in the Eltham Rural Group. ERG had its origins in 1953, when Marion Erswell organised a local committee to raise funds for the Melbourne University's Appeal for International House. On Sunday 13th November 1955, a meeting was convened at Frank and Clare May's Sweeney's Lane home "Yarra Braes" to wind up the University work, but the women at that meeting had so enjoyed working together that they decided to carry on as a fund raising committee for local charities. Mum was a 1953 foundation member of the Group. In some 60 years, more than \$1.2 million dollars has been distributed amongst local charities.

As did some of my friends, I attended St. Margaret's Church of England in Pitt St. I was an Altar Boy / Server and Crucifer. My first minister was David Warner and later Bill Carter. The organist at first was John Llewellyn and later Joe Vaughan Johnson. We all belonged to the Young Anglican Fellowship and attended yearly Youth Camps at Warburton.

My best friend at Ivanhoe Grammar was Steven Harris of St. Ronan's in Banoon Road, Eltham South. We not only travelled to school together, we both went to the Pony Club and when we were older, to the same parties. Later, as a number of other Eltham people did, we both had boats up at Eildon. Steve was the best man at my wedding to Jutta in 2004.

### Connect with Us

We have various ways you can share and connect with our Society.

**Newsletter** Our recent survey of members indicated our newsletter is a popular feature. This is distributed to members every two months and earlier digitised versions can be read or downloaded from our website at [www.elthamhistory.org.au](http://www.elthamhistory.org.au)

**Website** Our website is a treasure trove of historical information and links. New information is regularly added and it is worth visiting [www.elthamhistory.org.au](http://www.elthamhistory.org.au) to investigate the range of resources there. These include the popular **ThrowbackThursday** posts when we travel back in time to visit and explore early images of the Eltham district. A new feature post introduced in February is called **MysteryMonday**, where we ask readers to help us identify an image or images we have in our collection, but where we don't have sufficient background information. Here you have the opportunity to play detective to assist us.

**Facebook** Our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/elthamhistory/](http://www.facebook.com/elthamhistory/) enables active interaction and information sharing with members and visitors, including with our regular linked posts for ThrowbackThursday and MysteryMonday. There is much content there to explore and share.

**Victorian Collections** Victorian Collections is a free, web based, collection management and publishing system utilised by the Eltham District Historical Society. There are currently over 6500 EDHS records and images uploaded as part of our ongoing digitising and cataloguing program being undertaken by our dedicated collections team. Go on, be amazed and enjoy a visit to [victoriancollections.net.au](http://victoriancollections.net.au) and search for Eltham District Historical Society.

You can also follow us on **Twitter** @ElthamHistory and on **Historypin** you can explore the changes between 1968 and today on a walk along Main Road, Eltham. There is a link to this and these other mentioned features from our webpage at [www.elthamhistory.org.au](http://www.elthamhistory.org.au).

You can also email us at [edhsoffice@gmail.com](mailto:edhsoffice@gmail.com) or post mail to PO Box 137 Eltham 3095.

## Eltham Community Centre Opening

The following article written by Russell Yeoman is from newsletter Number 1 for the Shire of Eltham Historical Society, published in May 1978.

“The Eltham Community Centre was opened on 22nd April by the Premier, the Hon. R.J.Hamer. It is the only mud brick Community Centre in Australia. The society was represented in displays at the centre by community groups. Our display featured old photos of the Community Centre environs and some historical details of part of the site of the building, which was once owned by Henry Dendy (of Brighton fame).

The Community Centre occupies lots 275 and 276 of Holloway’s 1851 subdivision, which he called ‘Little Eltham’. Lot 275 was purchased by Dendy in 1856 from Charles Wingrove and Alfred Armstrong. These men probably purchased the land from Holloway. Wingrove in 1858 became Secretary of the Eltham District Roads Board, a position he held for many years, whilst Dendy became a member of the Board and served one term as its President.

Dendy also purchased lots 277 and 281 on the opposite side of Maria Street (now Main Road) and extending between Pitt and John streets. The whole of his purchase was about 5 acres. Lots 275 contained a steam flour mill near the Diamond Creek whilst Dendy lived in a house at the front of the land.

Dendy’s wife Sarah died in Eltham in 1860, aged 57 years and also in that year Dendy was appointed Chairman of the committee to established a Church of England in Eltham. He donated half of one of his Pitt Street lots for this purpose. St Margaret’s Church was opened on this site and remains in well preserved state today. The old vicarage is now named Dendy House.



Henry Dendy c1875  
Photograph - EDHS collection

In 1867 Dendy sold his land and business to William F. Ford of Malmsbury for 600 pounds and shifted to Walhalla where he had an interest in a copper mine. He is buried in the Walhalla Cemetery.

No trace of Dendy’s mill or house exist on the site today, but trees on the land could well have been planted in Dendy’s time. An avenue of trees leading to the creek may have bordered the track to the mill”.

The Eltham Community and Reception Centre, as it is now known, was reopened in June 2017 after extensions and an extensive refurbishment. It is considered to be the Shire of Nillumbik’s premiere function venue providing a fully-accessible and functional community space, while retaining the unique character of the original iconic mud brick building.

Refurbishment included accessibility upgrades, water harvesting, solar power, improved lighting, new amplifiers, improved foyer and commercial standard kitchen facilities.



## 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 11th April 2018, 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 2017 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. Consideration of honorary life membership.
8. 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.

There were a number of changes and initiatives during the last year, as well as celebrations to commemorate our 50th anniversary, while recognising what our members have achieved as an historical society. The recent awarding of the 2018 Nillumbik Community Group of the Year Award to our Society was an honour. While much has been achieved over the last 50 years there is still more to be done and you can assist.

We therefore urge members to contribute to the operation of our Society by becoming an office bearer or committee member. Please give the matter some consideration, particularly as some of our longer term committee members are retiring this year. If in doubt as to whether you can assist you could discuss this with one of our office bearers. The workload is not great. There are usually just five daytime committee meetings each year, alternating with our Society meetings.

We warmly welcome fresh ideas to help us to continue to run a vibrant organisation to maintain our intention of promoting, encouraging and assisting with the preservation and conservation of places and records of historical importance within the Eltham district.

## Hamish Knox and Associates

Eltham District Historical Society appreciates the sponsorship of Hamish Knox and Associates.

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Hamish Knox celebrates and honours the tradition of alternative building styles used throughout our region. He continues the family connection with our Society as his Father, Alistair, was a founding member in 1967.

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- David Johns, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – Telephone 9434 3357

We appreciate the financial support provided by Nillumbik Shire Council, Eltham Rotary and the Eltham Community Craft and Produce Market Committee of Management

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