

Newsletter

No. 248 October 2019



An Excursion or Two

Jim Connor

In our last newsletter we mentioned one of our recent heritage excursions, which was through the John Street, Eltham mud brick precinct and nearby streets. Included in the article was this photograph taken at the property of Brian and Jenny Ellis, during a rain shower on a somewhat wet and cold winter day.



Jenny later sent us a note saying the photograph shows people looking at the rammed earth, wood and mud section of their house. Jenny mentioned this was built in about 1952/53 by renowned builder John Harcourt, who built his own stone and mud house 'Clay Nuneham' at the base of the steep hill below 'Stanhope'. Apparently John was self taught and his wife Fay and their son did much of the work.

The Historic John Street mud brick precinct
Somewhat of a wet and cold winter day

Jenny commented that her parent's place in York Street was regarded as an experimental building site by her father. One wall of Harcourt's extension fell over one night, narrowly missing Jenny who was sleeping on a verandah of the old wooden cottage...thus enabling her to write to us. The study to the west is of mud brick, made by Sonia Skipper and helpers. It was felt that as Sonia was a graduate of Montsalvat's mud brick work, she really knew what she was doing. Their pottery was built by Peter Glass, who also built his house in John Street, with the Bell Brothers.

On Saturday 7th September 2019 our Secretary Russell Yeoman led members and visitors on another interesting excursion, this time through the Culla Hill area in Eltham South, where there are strong links to Thomas Sweeney, one of the very early Eltham pioneers.



We were pleased to have a descendant of the Sweeney/Carrucan extended family join us and were fortunate to be able to visit the original Sweeney 'Culla Hill' property, which is now called 'Sweeney's'. We appreciated the generosity of the current owners to allow our group to walk around their property.

Photographs Jim Connor

Our excursion group at the Sweeney 'Culla Hill' property

Next Meeting

8.00pm Wednesday 9th October 2019
Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre
Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion

2.00pm Saturday 2nd November 2019
A Meander in Montmorency

See further details on page 2

Our Next Meeting - Wednesday 9th October 2019

It was intended that Dr. Andrew Lemon AM would be our guest speaker at our last meeting on Wednesday 14th August 2019, to talk about *Heritage Advocacy - the role of historical research and historical societies*. Unfortunately, due to a clash of commitments Andrew apologised for not being able to attend and we are delighted he will now be our speaker at our next meeting on Wednesday 9th October. As mentioned in our last newsletter, this presentation was very well received when Andrew was the keynote speaker at the recent Regional Conference of the Association of Eastern Historical Societies.

Andrew is an independent professional historian who has published many commissioned local and institutional histories since his first book, *Box Hill*, forty years ago. He has now written sixteen books, four of which have won prizes, on subjects ranging from local history, sport, education and biography.



Dr Andrew Lemon AM

Andrew received his doctorate of letters from the University of Melbourne in 2004 because of the excellence of a body of work, not one single piece, as in a thesis. He has been a consistent supporter of our Society and a long term member, who has spoken at a number of our meetings, over many years.

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

We look forward to seeing you then.

November Excursion - A Meander in Montmorency

This is a walk of about 3 km between Montmorency and Briar Hill. When we did a similar walk in 2013, we started with a train trip from Eltham to Montmorency Station. This time we will not include a train trip as an official part of the excursion because of the frequent disruptions to weekend services. However, if trains are running participants may like to catch the 2.01 pm train from Eltham on Saturday 2nd November. To allow for this we will meet at Montmorency Station at 2.05 pm to commence the walk.

We will start by viewing the famous Were Street mosaics that depict anecdotes about early residents and traders in this village shopping strip. We will also consider the history of Montmorency station, which is soon to be re-modelled as part of the Hurstbridge line upgrade. On the walk to Briar Hill we will talk about the residential subdivisions of the 1910s/20s that established Montmorency as a suburb. Featured locations on the walk will include the site of the Briar Hill timber mill, Briar Hill overpass where there was once a tiny timber bridge over the railway and St Faith's Church.

The free walk is open to Society members and the general public. It should take about 2 to 2.5 hours. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.



Montmorency Railway Station cJuly 1983
Photograph of a red rattler Tait train by George Coop
Copy held in the EDHS collection

Never heard of it? Well, you would have if you'd been living in Eltham in the mid-1920s. Possibly enthused by the coming of electric trains to Eltham in 1923, residents of Glen Park (now Eltham North) felt that they deserved a station of their own. Following numerous public meetings in 1924 and 1925, a deputation of residents met with the Railway Commissioners in 1926, urging that a station be provided near Colemans Corner, which is the distinct bend in Main Road just past Wattletree Road. (At the time, the railway level crossing and the road bridge across the Diamond Creek were closer to Edendale Farm, aligned with Coleman Crescent and Progress Road. So the station could have been placed right where the level crossing is now!) It was suggested that Research residents would also use the station, but this was dubious: they might have still gone to Eltham for its better train service and shops.



Looking east across flooded Diamond Creek towards Glen Park level crossing, 1924
Photograph (modified) from EDHS collection

Residents said they would be happy with a mere "flag stop" (an unstaffed station) with just a short platform (length of one carriage), but the Railway Officials rejected that. In 1928 they wrote back insisting "for operational reasons" it would have to be a normal full-length platform with booking office, shelter shed, waiting room and toilets and even a caretaker's residence. And the residents would have to raise the finance for all that, as the Government couldn't afford it. As well, the Railway Officials were unenthusiastic about the location. They claimed it was too close to Eltham.

Another mooted site was north of Allendale Road; that was too close to Diamond Creek (and a bit remote). Taking their cue from Goldilocks, they reckoned that Mr Murray's property, halfway between Eltham and Diamond Creek, would be just right. That puts the site near Murrays Wetlands on the Diamond Creek Trail between Eltham North Reserve and Allendale Road.

But although the Government were willing to put a station there, it would come at quite a cost to residents, particularly James Murray. He had already had to cede part of his land when the railway line came through in 1912; he would have to give up even more for the station. To make matters worse, there was no public road access to the site, which the Government maintained wasn't their problem. Unsurprisingly, it proved to be a prohibitively expensive stumbling block for residents to overcome.



Station site near Murray's Wetlands
Photograph by Richard Pinn

But the issue never went away. In 1939 the Eltham Betterment League were again pushing for a station near Colemans Corner. At the time, though, a more pressing issue was poor visibility at the Glen Park level crossing, which had contributed to several accidents including a fatality. The crossing was moved to its present Wattletree Road location in about 1958. Since then, one of the candidates at almost every State election has floated the idea of a new station at Eltham North (but where?) or Allendale Road. But these days it seems unlikely that such a station will ever be built, and even more unlikely that it would be called Glen Park.

Source: Hurstbridge Advertiser (several articles 1924-1928 and 1939)

*This article by R.D. Taylor was published in The Advertiser on 9th September 1932.
The first part was included in our last (August) newsletter.*

The Early Days - Second Instalment

Business Places

At one time Eltham was considered the healthiest, wealthiest, and prettiest little village outside of Melbourne, and some of these assets still remain. It possessed two resident doctors, but after a short period both departed, as they said they could not live on fresh air alone.



It was a flourishing business place, there being a flour mill, a brewery, a tannery, two bakeries, two butchers' shops, two slaughter yards (where two or three bullocks and a number of sheep were killed weekly) two blacksmiths' and wheelwright shops, three grocery businesses, two shoe shops, two hotels besides other places, and between 50 and 60 hands were employed.

Mr. Dendy was the first owner of the flour mill, his father was a pioneer of Brighton. Mr. Steers had the brewery, which was afterwards taken over by Mr. Merrick, who also had the Fountain Hotel (later called the Evelyn Hotel), subsequently delicensed and destroyed by fire. Mr. Pearson built the tannery, and it was not unusual to see 100 tons of wood stacked in the mill yard.

Big Market Trade

Another splendid industry was fruit growing. Eltham was then noted for its cherry gardens, and it was customary to see from 20 to 30 market carts going to the city twice a week. The market in those days was held in Bourke street, Melbourne, where the Eastern Market is now. The method then was for the gardeners to back their carts into the water channel and place their produce on the footpath for sale. Wood-carting was also a live industry, and between 30 and 40 carters took wood away three times a week, and an average of from 200 to 300 tons were taken every week to Fitzroy wood market, which was then near where the Town Hall is now situated.

Melbourne in those days was lighted by kerosene, and one would see the lamplighters running around, with small ladders on their shoulders for the purpose of reaching the lamps. Mr. Barrett, of Eltham, seems to be the only one of that brigade who is left. Lately he has passed on.

The Royal mail coaches then ran daily, one coming from Yarra Glen and changing horses at the Eltham Hotel. Cobb and Co. had their own blacksmith, who was Mr. W. A. Blake. He afterwards commenced business in Ivanhoe and then retired and lived in Fairfield, being well over 90 years of age. He died recently. The mail coach travelled through Christmas Hills, Watson's Creek and Kangaroo Ground. At the same time there was a mail coach travelling from Queenstown and Kingstown (the latter now called Panton Hill, after the P.M., Mr. Panton). This coach changed horses at the Fountain Hotel. The Eltham road was the only one for through traffic to Woods Point, Matlock, Jamieson, etc., and some of the big teamsters were Mergers, Steer and Sons, W. Triggs, Blackburn, Morris, Williams, Rolfe and others. Occasionally they would get snow bound.



The Fountain Hotel, Main Road Eltham
Photograph from the EDHS collection

(continued on page 5)

Eltham Market

The market in Eltham was supported by such leading firms as Adamson, Strettle and Co., McPhail Bros. and others, and was considered to be the best outside of Melbourne. The stock was brought from Yarra Glen, Whittlesea, Morang and surrounding districts, and the dairymen and other dealers attended this market every fortnight.

Gold digging was also brisk, fairly rich gullies being worked within a few miles of Eltham. There were hotels or "shanties," which obtained a cheap license. At the Lower Plenty, where there was a toll gate, one was run by Mr. Dancer. There was also another licensed "shanty" where the obelisk now stands, called the Bricklayers' Arms, kept by Mr. W. Friar; the Wallaby Arms, between Eltham and Research, kept by Mr. John Norman; one at Research, with a grocery combined, called the Research Hotel, run by a Mr. Cockshot. It got its name from the way in which the gullies were being re-searched for gold. Amongst the men who reared large families was Mr. N. Rodda, and three of his sons became Church of England ministers.



Main Road Research c1910
Postcard scanned from the collection of
Michael Aitken on loan to EDHS

Eltham Common

A large tract of country leading to the Yarra was known as the Eltham Common, and vested in managers. who engaged a herdsman to look after the stock, the charge for running the cattle being 2/- per head per year. Mustering days were twice a year, when the cattle were brought into a large yard and a tar brand with the letter G was put on them. The first mustering yard was on Ferny Hill, near Mr. Trail's property. The yard was afterwards removed to the three-chain road, where the gravel pits now are. It was the managers of the common who got the Government to allow the three-chain road for the convenience of the stock on mustering days, which were red letter days for the lads.

The present main road leading to the Lower Plenty was purchased from Dr. Martin, and for several years was in such, a bad state, that the carters voluntarily offered to give a couple of days work to put it in order, which was gladly accepted, by the council, the latter only having been in existence a few years. The shire was proclaimed in 1871, the district having been under a road board from 1865 to 1871. The money for road repairs in the early days was revived from toll gates and Government grants.

Conclusion

While writing the recollections of early days memories of happy times have come to me, and the genuine friendship and spirit of the settlers is something to be remembered. Amongst the annual meetings was the Yan Yean picnic, where everyone seemed to assemble on New Year's Day. This is still held annually. Looking back upon the struggles and hardships of settlers in those days, one is reminded of the praise meted out to the nurses and soldiers during the war; for their heroic conduct, but they were only following the good example set then by their ancestors, who were the pioneers of the country. People in the early days seemed happy and contented, and to the descendants of those worthy pioneers I extend my best wishes.

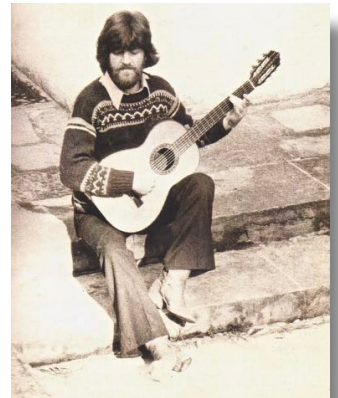
(Mr. Taylor wrote these interesting memories during a period of sickness last year while lying in bed. During his long residence in Eltham he has taken an active part in local affairs, his longest term of office being secretary for the Rechabite Lodge (55 years), and he is still secretary. He was a councillor for some years, and also shire president, and has been a continuous adherent of the Methodist Church.- Ed. "A.")

Justus Jorgensen was born in 1894, trained in Melbourne as an architect and later became immersed in painting, including studying under Max Meldrum in Melbourne. In 1924 he travelled to Europe with his wife Lily and some like minded artistic friends, to further pursue their interests. After living a very different lifestyle including travelling, painting and also exhibiting his works, he returned to Melbourne in 1929. Later he decided to live in Eltham, so in about 1934 they managed to purchase land and he gathered students and friends to assist with the building of Montsalvat.

This was developed by Justus Jorgensen as an artist's colony, influenced by his European experiences. Spread over about 5 hectares (12 acres) it is set amongst established gardens near the Eltham Cemetery. Montsalvat is a unique icon in the artistic and cultural life of Melbourne and well beyond. There is a range of buildings, including artist's houses/workshops and the Great Hall, all constructed from a mix of recycled materials, timbers, rammed earth and local stone. Various artisans learnt and honed their skills working on projects there, over many years; skills they then continued to utilise in various other creative pursuits. Artists, sculptors, builders, jewellers, designers, landscapers and many others found it a place that allowed and encouraged them to extend and develop their creativity. Justus had the vision and he gathered around him many who helped turn his dream into living reality. Montsalvat is a significant part of our local history, it is a touchstone, a melting pot reflecting the invested skills of many people, over many years.

Justus later had two sons with Helen Skipper, who also lived and worked at Montsalvat. Sebastian was born on 10th July 1938 and Sigmund on 29th April 1940. They spent their childhood raised among the collective lifestyle that existed there and both continued to have a lifelong connection with the legendary institution created by their father.

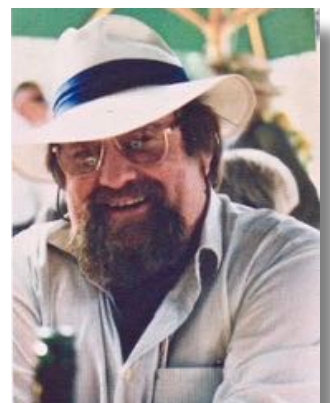
Sebastian became enthralled with music, particularly in playing and studying the classical guitar, which he excelled at and performed with many renowned musicians. After returning in the early 1970s from over ten years in Europe he discovered, explored, adapted and recorded indigenous music for the classical guitar. Having been raised in a communal lifestyle he felt at home among Aborigines living in Arnhem Land, where he developed life long friendships. In later years Sebastian experienced bouts of ill health and sadly passed away on 19th August 2019. Family and friends shared many tributes and a musically inspired celebration at Montsalvat on 16th September 2019.



Sebastian Jorgensen
Photograph
Celebration Booklet

After his local schooling Sigmund attended Melbourne University where he became involved in theatre production and design, then travelled to Europe in the 1960s to further his learnings. Upon returning from overseas in 1969 he became heavily involved in the running and exploration of new ideas to help support Montsalvat. These included various festivals, concerts, art displays and music events. He also became active in local community issues and politics, including standing for State Parliament and being elected as a Nillumbik Shire Councillor and was Mayor. In 2013 he received an OAM for his contributions to music and the arts.

Sadly, Sigmund passed away on 21 July 2019 and many members of his extended family and friends gathered at Montsalvat on 9th August 2019 to celebrate the life of this extraordinary man. In farewelling Sigmund, his life partner Sue Giffney, said: 'Many thanks for great conversations, adventures, plenty of good food and wine, and most of all crazy laughter.'



Sigmund Jorgensen
Photograph
Celebration Booklet

Indeed, the end of an era.

It was only when I attended Sig's Memorial Service I realised that I had known Sig for seventy years, probably longer than anyone else there.

It all began when we came out to Australia and met Arthur Munday from Montsalvat or, as all the locals called it, The Artists' Colony. My mother soon became fast friends with him and he would stop in for a sherry with my grandmother. My mother asked him to recommend a primary school for my brother and I and he recommended Research Primary School, which his daughter attended and was run by Mr. and Mrs. Brandon.

So, in 1950 off we duly went to and from school in a red Lyon's bus from the railway station, and that was where we met the three children from Montsalvat. Sebastian the son of Justus Jorgensen and Helen Skipper, Saskia Munday, the daughter of Arthur Monday and Sonia Skipper, and Sigmund Jorgensen also the son of Justus and Helen. Seb and Sas were very grown up and in grade six, but Sig was in grade four, one above us. They caught the same bus as we did, so I got to know Sig quite well.

When we were eight, we commenced riding lessons at Montsalvat with Sig's mother Helen Skipper. Sas who was horse mad occasionally came and helped. We met all the residents of the Artists' Colony in the following years; Mr. and Mrs. Jorgensen, Mr. and Mrs. Skipper, Sonia and Matcham Skipper all very friendly and kind to two eight year old children. Often Seb or Sig came to speak to us, a great treat as Seb was five years older than we were and already at Eltham High School, and Sig was also older than us and a whole grade above us at school!

Both of the boys were members of the 1st Eltham Scouts and as my brother was a member of the Wolf Cubs they had some topics in common. They showed us their room with the walls covered with pictures of figures doing semaphore, the Morse code alphabet with its dots and dashes, and also the flag signals of the Royal Navy. By the time my brother turned eleven and went up to Scouts, Sig was already a Patrol Leader and proved to be a very active member.

Some of the meetings were actually held at Montsalvat. Both Sig and my brother went to the Pan-Pacific Jamboree at Wonga Park in 1955/6. Whilst most of the Scouts dropped out when they were about sixteen due to school work etc. Sig went on to Senior Scouts and eventually became a Queen's Scout, one of the first for the 1st. Eltham.

He completed his schooling at Eltham High and returned to do second year matriculation as his first year marks were not good enough for him to get into pre-medicine. As a result he was head prefect (school captain).

When we moved to Laughing Waters he came down for a swim several times. He was very fond of my mother, and she of him.

This photograph is of Sig and two old school friends at my 18th birthday party. Chris Bell wore a top hat, Richard Appleby Mickey Mouse ears and Sig Jorgensen, a bowler hat. All attended Eltham High School and then Melbourne University.

Christopher Bell was later a Medical Scientist and Professor of Physiology at Trinity College, Dublin. Richard Appleby became Anglican Archbishop of Newcastle and then of Brisbane. Sig Jorgensen was a Director and Arts and Heritage Advisor to the Montsalvat Trust.



Chris Bell Richard Appleby Sig Jorgensen
at Ann Constable's 18th birthday party
Photograph provided by Ann Constable

These stories are part of a series about the lives of people buried at the Eltham Cemetery.

Peter Paul Lawlor

The Victorian gold rush came to Eltham in the early 1850s and with it came a crime wave. Local traders called for police protection. This led to the appointment in 1857 of Irish-born Peter Lawlor as Senior Constable at Eltham. In 1859 Peter and his wife Kate were able to move into an official police residence at the corner of Maria Street (now Main Road) and Brougham Street, with stables out the back and a large paddock for grazing across the road. Some of their children went to Eltham Primary School. That 1859 police residence is now the home of the Eltham District Historical Society. The small wooden building on the very corner is a modern replica of the separate police station/office built around 1885-1900.

Cases investigated by Constable Lawlor included murders, stealing (horses, cattle, fowls, watches, linen, clothing), a search for a missing person, and two separate instances of abandoned children seeking help. He was officially commended in 1866 for bringing to justice a man who had indecently assaulted an 11-year old girl. Sadly, there was a similar but unconnected case only a few months later. But events had a lighter side: in 1871 Kate lent her piano to the Snowflakes Christy Minstrels for a Catholic Church fund-raising concert. Peter was transferred to Prahran in 1872. He died in 1876 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with four of his children. His headstone was stolen in about 1985, but was returned anonymously (broken into three pieces) in 2013. It is resting on his grave but has not been re-erected.

Main source: Various newspaper articles 1859-1872



Photograph EDHS collection

Myles Archibald Lyons

In 1872 Senior Constable Myles Lyons replaced Peter Lawlor at Eltham Police Station. Earlier in his career, he had taken part in a search (one of many) for missing explorers Burke and Wills. At Eltham, his arrests ranged from minor instances of theft, vandalism and larrikinism to serious cases of manslaughter, murder and attempted suicide. He even tracked down and arrested two Norwegian seamen charged with desertion from their vessel. While conveying a prisoner from Eltham to Melbourne in 1886, he was attacked by the prisoner en route.

It seems that much of the local news in the Evelyn Observer was provided by Eltham Shire Secretary C.S. Wingrove. In 1878, Eltham residents held an "Indignation Meeting" at the Evelyn Hotel, complaining that the reporting had denigrated Lyons' conduct and had stigmatised the character of Eltham's inhabitants. They passed a resolution castigating Wingrove and supporting Lyons. Wingrove claimed to have been misconstrued. But in 1887 the Evelyn Observer carried a long ranting vitriolic editorial. It complained about inadequate policing generally, then attacked Lyons personally, saying that (although efficient in the past) he had now become incompetent and needed to be replaced by a younger more energetic man.

Myles Lyons retired due to ill health in 1889 but remained in Eltham until his death in 1899. He is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Flora and five of their children. Four sons moved to Western Australia where two were killed in unconnected railway accidents.

Main source: Articles in the Argus, The Age and the Evelyn Observer 1872-1887



Photograph EDHS collection

EDHS Local History Week Activities

EDHS Open Day - Sunday 13th October - 2.00pm - 4.30pm

Again this year our Society will hold an Open Day event at the Eltham Heritage Justice Precinct, on the corner of Main Road and Brougham Street. There will be local history presentations, photographs to view and some special treats. The former Eltham Courthouse, the former Police House (Local History Centre) and replica Police Station will be open for inspection, as will the renovated Lock Up. Come along and view one of the few intact heritage precincts left in Victoria.

EDHS Eltham Cemetery Walk - Saturday 19th October - 2.00pm

Eltham Cemetery is the custodian of more than 150 years of Eltham's history. This walking tour will visit the historical sections of the cemetery where we will discuss information about selected pioneers who contributed to the establishment of early Eltham. We will also talk about interesting and important local people buried in more recent times. This walk is open to EDHS and visitors and will start at 2.00pm in the car park entered from Cemetery Road.

Eltham Community and Reception Centre

The Premier, the Hon R. J. Hamer, opened the building now known as the Eltham Community and Reception Centre on 22nd April 1978, but what is the history of the area?

Henry Dendy (of Brighton fame) once owned part of the site of the building. It occupies lots 275 and 276 of Josiah Holloway's 1851 subdivision, which he called "Little Eltham". Dendy purchased Lot 275 in 1856 from Charles Wingrove and Alfred Armstrong, who probably purchased the land from Holloway. Wingrove in 1858 became Secretary of the Eltham District Road 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 to 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. Lot 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 at Eltham in 1860, aged 57 years. Also in that year Dendy was appointed Chairman of a committee to establish a Church of England in Eltham and he generously donated half of one of his Pitt Street lots for this purpose. St Margaret's Church was opened on this site and has been extended in recent years, which included removing the rear 'temporary' wall. The old vicarage is now named Dendy House.

In 1867 Dendy sold his land and business to William F. Ford of Malmsbury for £600 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 exists on the site today, but trees on the land could well have been planted in Dendy's time. An avenue of trees leading towards the creek may have bordered the track to the mill.



Eltham Community and Reception Centre 2019
Photograph Jim Connor

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- Russell Yeoman, Society Secretary – Telephone 9439 9717 – edhsoffice@gmail.com
- Lesley Mitchell, Treasurer / Membership Secretary – edhstreasurer@gmail.com

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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*Any images displayed in this newsletter from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection are held in partnership between Eltham District Historical Society and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library)



ELTHAM CEMETERY

EST. 1858

Burial Grounds: Mt Pleasant Road, Eltham
www.elthamcemetery.com



Our Eltham, Our History

For further information contact Rita:

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Ph: (03) 9432 1963 Email: admin@elthamcemetery.com