

# Newsletter

No. 249 December 2019



## In the Blink of an Eye

Jim Connor

In historical terms 25 years is just a blink of an eye, a relatively short time frame, yet 15 December 2019 marks 25 years from when the Shire of Eltham, established in 1871, ceased to exist. Councillors were sacked and the Shire of Nillumbik was created.

Eltham will  
always  
be 'green'

ELTHAM Shire will cease to exist this week, but the values of the community will live on.

Much has changed during this relatively short time. The transition to the new shire was not an easy experience for some people in our community and especially for some staff of the former Shire of Eltham. Three commissioners were appointed by the State Government to run the new shire, and an extensive staff restructure was undertaken, resulting in many local community aware and knowledgeable Eltham Shire staff being made redundant. Some actions initiated at that time by the government and commissioners have had longer term impacts. These included the demolition

## Shire of Montsalvat is born

At one stage the name 'Montsalvat' was being considered for the new shire

of the Eltham Shire Offices and approval, in controversial circumstances, of a combined petrol station and fast food development on the site; this was a difficult time for many people.

Fortunately, our Society holds many early records of the former Shire of Eltham, as well as local press reports from the Diamond Valley News during the re-structure period, some of which make interesting reading, with articles having headlines such those as shown here.

The new Shire of Nillumbik consisted of the Central and North Ridings of the former Shire of Eltham, as well as parts of the former Diamond Valley, Whittlesea and Healesville municipalities. The West Riding of Eltham was joined with the former City of Heidelberg to become the City of Banyule.

News watch

## Shire now Nillumbik

So, in the blink of an eye, historically, the Nillumbik Shire is 25 years old. Along the way it has developed its own varied local history, and will no doubt continue to do so.

### FOCUS

## 'Nothing' to fear from commissioners

We hope you enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time over Christmas and have a healthy and successful year in 2020

See page 3 for details about our Christmas function on Wednesday 11th December 2019

My parents Frank and Gladys Stokes bought land and planted an orchard in 1942. Because of World War 2 building materials and permits were not available. So Frank obtained some second hand materials and built a "packing shed".

We moved from Mitcham in 1946, I was six years old, my sister three and my brother one. I remember how cold it was that first winter with no lining in the "house". In time, my dad obtained hessian bags which he opened and nailed to the frame. Whitewashing them with lime stopped the breezes. Dad fenced off 25 acres for planting fruit trees with some help from a casual labourer (Hawkins). Dad bought two draft horses to pull a single furrow plough as well as a buggy used to carry firewood and later fruit to sell around Eltham.

We had a mixture of fruit trees, peaches, pears, cherries, lemons and almonds. The almond row was in the middle of the planting as they flower first in Spring and so bring bees for pollination. Later he set up several bee hives on the property. We also had two milking cows, chickens and the usual dog and cat.

I remember my first day at Eltham Elementary School (Dalton Street). I walked to the school, about two kilometres, with a neighbour who attended Eltham High School. I asked the children in the playground where I could find the Grade 1 line. My parents had no transport or time to take me.

Growing up on the orchard was hard in many ways.

Of course the fruit trees take several years to bear and no welfare was available in those days. My dad was a firm believer that as he prayed God would supply our needs. One day when things were tough, two men came to the door with a truck and asked if they could harvest some of the prickly Bursaria to be dried and a chemical extracted used in aerial photography. They paid us a good amount. Months later, they were back for more leaving the Bursaria nicely pruned.

By the time I was at Eltham High School my sister and I milked the cows before school and fed the chooks along with other chores. Our mailbox was on a tree at the corner of Bible and Pitt streets, which meant we walked home from school that way. Often on a Saturday I would ride my scooter to the grocer to buy several items - that was the shop next to the post office between John and Bridge streets.

Life was hard but those hardships brought us together as a loving family. Summertime was particularly hard. We had no electricity and no running water. Our Coolgardie safe was all we had for milk and butter etc. So often the milk went sour and the butter rancid. Parts of Eltham benefitted by the ice-man delivering blocks of ice for ice chests. But we did not benefit, whether it was too far away or too expensive, I don't remember, but very occasionally I remember Dad bringing home a block of ice and we had great fun making ice-cream in a little churn, where crushed ice was mixed with salt around a central cylinder where we put the milk cream and vanilla mixture. Those days really stand out in my memory.



Frank Stokes with daughters Dorothy (left) and Beryl (right) at Stokes Orchard, Nyora Road, Eltham, 1944.  
Photograph - Beryl Bradbury

*(continued on page 3)*

## Memories of My Life Growing Up in Eltham

*(continued from page 2)*

Because it was just after World War 2, some food was hard to get. Our food consisted of home made bread, (when dad was able to get a sack of flour) and oatmeal porridge. Once dad brought home some bags of coloured sugar (maybe used for fairy floss), and we made lots of coloured jam with our own fruit. Meat consisted of wild rabbits and hens that were too old to lay eggs. I remember also dad bringing home from the market, a whole sheep or calf's head out of which he would extract the brains tongue and cheeks. These were considered delicacies. Water was also scarce, especially in summer. We had one iron tank which supplied the family. Bath time was once a week, where we all used the same water from the youngest first and up. The water was rather brown by the time we had all finished!

Every week on Sunday we would walk to Sunday School at the Eltham Methodist Church and then back again on Sunday evenings. I enjoyed the junior choir and practice on Sunday evenings, usually walking home in the dark. Also Tuesday evening was our junior Christian Endeavour where we learned to lead meetings, speak in public and find helpful things to do for other people. Our relationship with God was a very important and motivating part of our lives. School was of course a big part of my life. I managed to do well in spite of having to do homework etc., shared with the family at the kitchen table with one kerosene lamp.

Going on to teacher's college, in Melbourne in 1956, I recall a lot of walking to and from the station, train travel, studying at the kitchen table again repeated daily. Thankfully I finished in 1959 and was appointed to local schools.

It was not until 1960 on my 21st birthday that the power was "switched on" and we had running water available.

I am thankful for a loving, hardworking and faith-filled family.



Stokes family, c.1952 outside the family home on the corner of Nyora Road and Eucalyptus Road

L-R: David, Howard, Beryl (kneeling), Dorothy and Gladys Stokes with Gladys's mother sitting in Gladys's father's car.

Photograph - Beryl Bradbury

### **Our Christmas Function - Wednesday 11th December 2019**

Our Christmas function will be held at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre from 7.30pm on Wednesday 11th December 2019.

Please note the time has changed from that shown in our annual program.

The format will be varied to encourage a relaxed, fun evening and will include some trivia, a few games, as well as a Christmas style supper and time to just chat.

All members are welcome and we look forward to sharing our end of year celebration with you.



## Unveiling of the Eltham War Memorial

“Beneath a lonely pine tree on the hill crest out from Eltham, where the Greensborough Road junctions with the main Melbourne Road, Eltham has erected an everlasting tribute to the memory of the fallen heroes of the district. It is an obelisk of Harcourt granite in the rough, bearing an appropriate inscription and 27 names - an unpretentious monument by the wayside, which will stand for all time silently expressing the appreciation of the living for the sacrifice of the dead. The obelisk stands 14 feet high. Strangely enough, the morning sun shining beneath the branches of the lonely pine will light up the gilt-lettered name of one who died in the Lone Pine charge of the 8th Light Horse.

Yesterday representatives of every house in the town, and many people from the surrounding district, gathered around the obelisk for the opening ceremony. The spring-like sunshine of the afternoon attracted everybody out of doors. There must have been 700 people present when the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir William Irvine, removed the draping of flags and revealed the names on the obelisk, the base of which was surrounded by wreaths and branches of wattle bloom, placed there by parents whose sorrow at the loss of sons was blunted, for the day at least, by feelings of pride.

Sir William Irvine, who was suffering from a severe cold, said it was a high honour indeed to unveil a memorial to the 27 soldiers of the district who had fallen. For such a small community Eltham had done very well in its war service. The feelings of sorrow of the bereaved were mitigated by pride in the glorious achievements of their sons and the victory that had been gained. He would say to the fathers and mothers of the dead, that the deaths of those whom the obelisk would commemorate were not real tragedies, as the men had achieved the highest purpose for which all were born.

There could be no greater service to one's country or Maker than the service rendered by these men. Their courage to fight was based on faith in God, which was at the base of all good lives. The obelisk would remind the people of a great Christian sacrifice long after those at the unveiling ceremony had passed away, and their children's children would be taught that the men whose names were there had fought and died for a thing higher than life itself - liberty. To the children it would be an inspiration to a higher path and better things.”

*Abbreviated from: Memorial to the Fallen. The Age, August 4, 1919 page 8.*



Unveiling of the Eltham War Memorial - Main Road and Bridge Street, Eltham - Photograph EDHS collection\*



Eltham War Memorial  
Photograph EDHS collection\*

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### Opening of St Andrews Gold Battery at Smiths Gully

On Friday 29th (August 1919) ... the Hon. S. Barnes, M. L. A., Minister of Mines, accompanied by Mr. W. Everard, M.L.A., Mr. V. Dickson, secretary for Mines, and Mr. Merrin, Chief Mining Inspector, visited Smith's Gully for the purpose of opening, the new Government battery which has recently been erected.

The party arrived punctually at 12.30, and was received by an assemblage of about 200 residents, including, those representing local prospecting and mining interests. At the mill house the Minister wished prosperity to mining on the old Queenstown field, and, in a few appropriate remarks, gave the battery the name of St. Andrew's. Then, as the stamps began to fall, three hearty cheers were given by the gathering. .... The Queenstown field, dating back to the early sixties, might be regarded as a link that took them back to the Augustine age of gold mining in Victoria...From 1868 to 1918 the total yield of gold from the field was 274,606 fine oz.



Queenstown (St. Andrews); opening of St. Andrews Battery near Smiths Gully Cemetery, c.1910. Burnt down in 1962 bushfire. Photograph EDHS collection\*

It might be that here, as elsewhere, deeper prospecting would give new life to the Queenstown goldfield. The miners of Queenstown, who through long year's had never lost faith in the possibilities of the field, felt that the purpose for which they were there that day marked the beginning of a new era in the history of local reefing. .... The new mill is situated on the bank of the creek opposite the Queenstown Cemetery, and consists of a five head battery ... and ... portable steam engine housed in a spacious structure of wood and iron. A concrete weir across the creek provides a good water supply, and all the necessary pumps, settling dams, etc., have been installed.

*Abbreviated from: The Minister of Mines at Queenstown, Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser and Diamond Creek Valley Advocate, Friday 5 September 1919, page 3.*

### Additional information

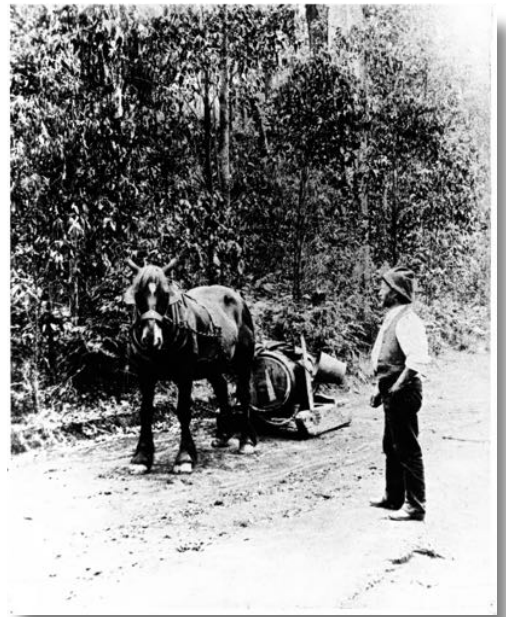
The remains of the St Andrews Gold Battery left after it was burnt down in the 1962 bushfire are considered to be historically and archaeologically significant to the Shire of Nillumbik, under a revised Statement of Significance dated 2010. This follows on from the Bick Study in 1992, which stated: 'The State Battery was the central component in the gold mining of this area from circa the 1920s. The battery crushed the gold bearing quartz extracted from the mines and was a sizeable weatherboard building enclosing the engine and stampers. All that now remains are the bases for the machinery that comprised the battery, one timber and a couple of concrete bases and the nearby dam, which supplied water. However the historic significance of the site remains and is enhanced by the Queenstown Cemetery on the other side of Smiths Gully Road.'

## Horses

**Horses Working Uphill** - unless the horse has a very light load, ease it of your weight by walking yourself uphill. Let it rest often if exertion is great - always putting a stone behind one wheel or drawing across the road. But stop long enough to let the horse really recover its wind, and make it worth its while to have the effort of a fresh start. This will not be time wasted: the horse will get on so much better afterwards. N.B. - Horses which are roasters are like as asthmatic people: they require to rest oftener and longer than others; and must at no time, be hurried either on levels or inclines.

**Watering Horses** - Carry a bucket hung on a hook at the tail of your cart or underneath it - so that when a chance offers you may have water for your horse. Frequent small draughts - (but you must see that they are small - little and often) greatly refresh horses whilst at work - do them no harm - and make them less inclined to drink too much on returning to the stable. A heated horse drinking cold water before standing any time is likely to get colic; but he may have, if thirsty, a mouthful of wet hay and a sip or two of water. Any water a horse first drinks on returning to the stable should have the chill carefully taken off it.

Source: Evelyn Observer February 1900



Carting water to the hotel at Kinglake  
Photograph EDHS collection\*

## Looking Back Looking Forward

- Summer Fun in Yarra Plenty
- 5 December 2019 - 6 January 2020

*The Eltham District Historical Society is a member of the Yarra Plenty Heritage Group, which together with the Nillumbik U3A Painting and Drawing Group, is exhibiting historical photographs and original artworks side by side in a celebration, at the Eltham Library Community Gallery, of all things summer - picnics, swimming, boating, horsing around and enjoying nature with family and friends during long summer days.*

*You are welcome to attend the opening on Thursday 5 December at 2.30pm or visit the exhibition during opening hours of the Eltham Library, up until 6th January 2020.*



Eltham War Memorial  
Photograph EDHS collection\*  
ARTS AND CULTURE | Nillumbik

Len Parker was a regular sight around the district for almost 40 years, selling fruit and veggies from the back of his truck, to his regular customers between 1939 and 1978, first in a 1927 Chevy then a 1949 Bedford truck.

Len's connection to the Eltham district started long before he was born. His father Fred first came through the district in the early 1900s. With horse and cart buying and selling what was available at the markets using his Mothers' home in North Melbourne as his base. Fred settled and developed a market garden in the rich soil along the creek at Watsons Creek, Christmas Hills in 1903.

Ada Watson was almost five years old and one of eight siblings aged two to sixteen, when her Grandfather and Father both named Christopher Watson brought the Eltham Hotel and they moved from Richmond. Ada's mother was formerly Emily Silk whose parents Martha and John Silk had been farming in Eltham around 1858 and much later a dairy farmer in Fitzroy.

In 1917 at St Margaret's Church Eltham, Fred aged 44 married Ada aged 35 who was still living and working at the Eltham Hotel. Six years later Ada died from cancer leaving Fred with two small children, Rose five and Len three.

Len as a young boy, like his Father before him worked the land with horses, growing vegetables, mainly potatoes, cabbages, pumpkins, beans and tomatoes, selling the excess at the market. Len took over from his ageing father Fred, who had established similar rounds selling door to door with a horse and cart. Len preferred mechanical horsepower to the real kind!

In 1939 at the age of eighteen Len brought an old 1927 Chevy Truck. He was taught how to drive it and two weeks later got his driver's Licence. The Chevy truck had an old wagon on the back with no doors, only hessian bags to keep the wind out! Len had paid 75 pounds for it, kept it for ten years and sold it for the same price!

Len's blue 1949 Bedford was brought new in 1950 for 900 pounds with only a tray back on it. Straight away Len had a wooden frame covered with canvas added, with a roll up front and back.

In later years, more solid sides replaced the canvas. Benches were added to hold the boxes of fruit and vegetables, with room to move in the middle, a fruit shop on wheels.

Len had large scales attached to a box for weighing the fruit and veggies and many a district baby was also weighed on them.

Len would stop at customer's homes, take their orders and with his big cane basket on his arm deliver their order to their door. On his rounds he always wore a big soft back leather apron and a black or navy beret. If it was cold he wore a "bluey" jacket on his tall slender frame.



Len Parker's Bedford at the Tosch home in Pantom Hill  
Photograph from Grace de Visser

*(continued on page 8)*

## Mr Parker

(continued from page 7)

Len would go to the markets early Thursday morning, only buying what was not grown at home or brought from his brother in law's orchard. On his way home Len would start his "rounds" in Lower Plenty and then Montmorency and parts of Eltham. Friday's regulars were in Research, Kangaroo Ground and Panton Hill. Saturdays were Panton Hill and Christmas Hills.

When Len retired in 1978, due to changing social times, women were working more and supermarkets starting to take over; his ageing truck was retired too.

In 1999 his son Jim had the Bedford restored, Len was very happy to see "Beddy" all shiny and new once again with just a tray back, like when it was new. Jim still drives the "Beddy" to Heritage Truck shows twenty years on.

Len married, had five children and lived most of his life, (except during World War 2 when he served in New Guinea), at Watsons Creek, Christmas Hills dying there in 2006 and is buried at the Kangaroo Ground cemetery with his wife of 64 years, Stella nee Tosch 1917 - 2007.



Len Parker with his 'Beddy' restored by his son Jim in 1999

Photograph from Grace de Visser

*Grace de Visser, the author of this article, is the daughter of Len Parker and a descendant of the two former owners of the Eltham Hotel, both named Christopher Watson.*

## Mosaics in Were Street, Montmorency

Along the footpaths in the local shopping centre in Were Street, Montmorency is a collection of mosaics. These formed part of a streetscape beautification project undertaken in 1995 by Banyule City Council and the former Eltham Shire Council.

These mosaics, which are placed at 12 different locations, depict anecdotes of the local history of Montmorency. The description at one of these (number 3) refers to Mr Parker selling fruit and vegetables from his truck.

It says: '*People bought fruit and vegetables from the back of Mr Parker's old Chevy truck, he always wore a red beret (1960s).*'

During our recent heritage excursion in Montmorency, Grace de Visser spoke about her Father and his activities selling from his truck, throughout the local area. Grace also mentioned Mr Parker actually wore a back or navy beret, not red as stated in the description panel for these mosaics.



Photograph Jim Connor



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

### David George Clark

David Clark was the first and longest-serving headmaster at Eltham Primary School, which began in 1855 as a private school held in the Wesleyan Chapel in Henry Street. The teachers were David (then aged 26) and his sister Catherine. Parents lobbied the Government to establish an official school, and a School Inspector came out to investigate. He found that the Clarks were of good moral and religious character (David taught Sunday School at St. Margaret's later on) and gave them his endorsement despite some perceived technical shortcomings. The school moved to its present Dalton Street site in 1856, in a bark hut. Soon afterwards it was replaced by a small stone building, which for a time also served as the Clarks' residence, but it fell down in about 1875. A larger and more substantial stone building was then constructed.



David Clark (left) at Eltham Primary School  
Photograph EDHS collection\*

David was well respected by the local community and constantly battled with the authorities to have facilities (such as toilets) at the school improved. He married in 1863, and in 1866 bought a block of land in Metery Road next to the school. His house, later called "Shoestring", still exists (albeit with significant modifications). David retired in 1889 after a period of ill health, Catherine having retired in 1887. He died in 1911 and is buried with his wife Elizabeth in the Eltham Cemetery.

*Main source: "We Did Open a School in Little Eltham".*

### William Crozier

William Crozier was a pioneer settler in the Eltham area. Born in Ireland in 1823, he migrated to Australia in 1850 with his wife Mary and their baby daughter. They came out on an "orphan immigrant ship": on board were twelve married couples and 235 female orphans aged between 16 and 18 years old. The Croziers journeyed to Eltham on a bullock wagon and acquired a 24-acre block of land on the northern side of Mount Pleasant Road, about half a mile east of Main Road, extending through to Pitt Street. They used the land for cultivation and grazing. The house, called "Belmont", was weatherboard with a rammed earth floor. Until the Wesleyan Church had its own building, services were conducted in the Croziers' home (and elsewhere).

William and Mary had six more children, though one son drowned in a dam on the property and another (John) was killed by a falling tree. Nevertheless, the farm prospered, enabling William to acquire a further 63-acre block in 1870, about half a mile east of the original 24-acre site. On the new block, he constructed a two-roomed dwelling of slats and bark, plus a store room of logs and bark.



Photograph Yvonne Camera

William died in 1909 and is buried with Mary and their son John in the Eltham Cemetery.

*Source: "Eltham Inhabitants" by Kenneth Eric Eckersall.*

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

*Printed by courtesy of Vicki Ward MP, State Member for Eltham*

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