

Newsletter

No. 250 February 2020



250

250 and still going strong !

In 2020 we take for granted that our Society regularly produces a quality newsletter, but for the first ten years of the Society's existence there was no newsletter, just occasional notices to members. The first newsletter was produced in May 1978 and the first article was as follows:

Newsletter Format

It has been proposed for some time that the society should produce a regular newsletter which is more than purely a notice of forthcoming society activities. An historical society newsletter should provide items of historical information and also record current happenings of historical significance. This newsletter makes a modest start on what, hopefully will be a regular format. It will be necessary however, that items for inclusion be provided by members and your co-operation in submitting suitable items is essential to the success of the operation. Draft articles can readily be adapted for use.



Russell Yeoman re-reading his first newsletter
Photograph - Jim Connor

For many years the newsletter was produced by Russell Yeoman with assistance from Eltham Shire Council, particularly as to photocopying. Preparation was rather primitive by today's standards such as gluing or taping illustrations to the page.

Russell originated this newsletter in 1978 and has been the guiding hand since. He hand wrote the articles for many years for various typists, but it is worth noting the contribution by Sue Law. She typed the newsletter over many years in addition to her various official roles including President. The first few issues were not numbered but then President Peter Bassett-Smith as a connoisseur of the written word insisted that they be numbered. After 250 issues we can appreciate the wisdom of that decision.

Over the past 25 years printing has come from various sources, but for some time it has been done by courtesy of various local Members of State Parliament, currently Vicki Ward MP, which is greatly appreciated.

For years very few articles were received from members. Today things are much different. With Jim Connor as editor regular contributions are received from members and others, resulting in a high quality newsletter largely distributed to members by email.

"Thank you to the Eltham and District Historical Society for ensuring the important stories, people and places from our past are always part of our future" Nillumbik Shire Council Mayor Karen Egan

Next Meeting

7.30pm Wednesday 12th February 2020
Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre
Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion

2.00pm Saturday 7th March 2020
Eltham's Hidden Creek
See further details on page 2

Our Next Meeting - Wednesday 12th February 2020

In previous years for our first meeting of the year, we have investigated some treasured pictures from our archives. This meeting we will showcase some of the highlights from new acquisitions and donations throughout 2019, as well as some of our other collections digitised during the year.

These are available due to the consistent efforts of our collections team, who over recent years has been active in scanning and cataloguing a range of images, including to our extensive catalogue on the Victorian Collections website.

Many of images to be shown at this meeting are still awaiting cataloguing online on Victorian Collections and so this will present their first public viewing.

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. **Please note our meetings now start at 7.30pm.**

We look forward to seeing you then.



Steam locomotive D639 passing through the level crossing at Wattleree Road, Eltham bound for Hurstbridge, c.1970
Photograph - George Coop

Note in the background the bluestone edging surrounding the grassy island in the intersection. This stone was originally part of the bluestone lock-up situated behind the Police Station and residence at 728 Main Road (present day Local History Centre and home to Eltham District Historical Society). Following a redesign of the intersection the stone was relocated back to 728-730 Main Road for use as garden edging.

March Excursion - Eltham's Hidden Creek

The watercourse now known as Karingal Yalloc was once called the Eltham West Drain. It enters the Diamond Creek near Brougham Street, Eltham and drains an area extending to St Helena and part of Greensborough. The creek has been undergrounded through part of the Eltham industrial area.

In 2013 we explored this creek upstream from Meruka Drive. For our March excursion we will follow the creek as closely as possible from the Diamond Creek to where it crosses under the railway line near Sherbourne Road. This is mainly through the industrial area and we will discuss Eltham's industrial history along the way. A particular feature is the former hat factory (Fort Knox Self Storage) at the end of the walk.



Former hat factory (Fort Knox Self Storage)
Photograph - Russell Yeoman

The distance is less than 2 km one way and should take about two hours, including plenty of time to stop and talk. There will be an informal return walk but those who wish to can catch a bus back.

This walk on **Saturday 7th March** will start at 2pm at the parking area below the Eltham Community and Reception Centre at the western end of Pitt Street (Melway ref 21 H 6).

This free walk is open to the general public as well as Society members. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions. The phone number for contact on the day is 0409 021 063.

The Fabbro farm properties in Eltham included almost the entire hill on the corner of Falkiner and Ely Streets, the large creek-front paddock on Bell Street (now known as “Fabbro Fields”) and most of the farmland along the Diamond Creek opposite the hill on Falkiner Street, (now called “Barak Bushland”).

We were lucky enough to have lived in the original “West family” 1850’s farm cottage on the Fabbro property, at the rear of 55 Falkiner Street, Eltham, for almost seven years.

I feel a responsibility to the story of this original “West family cottage”, and to the Fabbro farm property as we were the last (of many) tenants. We were evicted by developers, prior to the demolition of this cultural and historical cottage to make way for the subsequent housing development on the Falkiner Street hill.



Former Fabbro c1850’s farm cottage
Photograph - Hans Gregory c1989

The rent was \$50 per week (cash). Rent included the single bedroom cottage, an “outside bedroom” attached to the barn, exclusive use of the stand-alone bathroom (remodelled inside the old fibro milk separating shed) and shared use, with Maurie Fabbro, of the outhouse-toilet. This outhouse was around 100 yards from both the cottage and the newer Fabbro Italian Villa homestead (built by the Fabbro family).

But this story is to pay homage to the Bell Street River Flats.... The bottom paddock “Fabbro Fields”.

Maurie told me that when he was quite young they had emigrated by ship from Calabria and landed in Perth, from where they took a train to Esperance, to farm a tract of land. He recalls seeing the Aboriginal people along the train line, standing, watching, with spear in hand, one foot resting on the side of the other leg (reminiscent of pictures one may have had on old cake or biscuit tins). Maurie never did say exactly how long they stayed in Western Australia, but it seems they were soon in Melbourne (living off one of the Melbourne laneways), then to Eltham.

There’s much research I still need to do, however the Eltham floods article in *The Advertiser* of 7 December 1934 leads me to believe the Fabbro family arrived in Eltham in approximately 1933, taking up residence and working the land.

This Advertiser article relays the major flooding, which swept away all the infrastructure the Fabbros had developed “along the creek opposite the Lower Reserve”, “fencing”, “a valuable pump” and “levy banks”, as well as the year’s hard labour of market garden crops.

A subsequent Advertiser article (10 June 1938) about an Eltham Shire Council meeting reads:

“It was agreed on the motion of Cr. Andrew to agree to the request of Mr. G. Fabbro, Eltham to apply for a grant from the Rivers and Streams Fund to snag the Diamond Creek in front of his property. Mr. Fabbro offered to do the work.”

Memories and anecdotes of Mario (Maurie/Maurice) Fabbro *(continued from page 3)*

Was this de-snagging the creek, allowing it to run better? Or was this some sort of small dam? One assumes this work was around the bend in the Diamond Creek along the Bell Street flats, close to where the pump was used to source water from the Diamond Creek for crops, even in the 1990's.

Maurie said he and his brother would wake up early before school. He remembers his brother driving the truck to the Research chicken farm. Once there they would shovel the sloppy mess of chicken manure onto the Fabbro truck until full. Then they would drive to the bottom paddock (Bell Street) and proceed to unload and spread it for market garden fertiliser. Then he and his brother would go back home, have breakfast and then go to school. It was a different world – *a different life*.

One day I visited Maurie on the driveway under the villa house. He was quite angry, banging large, thick 8 inch nails up through planks of thick timber. He told me that some hooligans had driven into the river flats along Bell Street and had done donuts in their cars over his entire pumpkin crop. This kind of thing happened too often.

“They won't be doing that again!” said Maurie in his broad Australian accent, as he took the planks and carefully laid them, sharp nails facing up, across the entrance tracks to the bottom paddocks.

Many people remember the rows of artichokes, which Maurie grew in the Bell Street paddocks. I have always remembered them as “triffids”, reminding me of the John Wyndham classic story. Ploughed with tractor, then hand planted from cuttings selected from the previous year's plants. Hand hoeing the many rows. Watering with help of the pump located on the bank of the Diamond Creek.... Maurie took pride in his organic farming practices!

Maurie would harvest the artichokes when mature. He carefully pruned each artichoke by hand and packed them into wooden or polystyrene crates; loaded them into his small van and drove at 4.30-5am into the Footscray Fruit and Veggie market to sell his produce. The family had the same stall for decades!

Later in the season car-loads of Italian families would arrive at the villa house, almost in convoy, to purchase crates of the smaller, sweet artichokes which would be pickled and jarred for year-long eating. But it was not only artichokes that the Fabbro's grew. Many don't realise the range of produce. We hear about the famous Italian restaurants and farmers across Melbourne. Farm Vigano in South Morang, is an example of Italian fresh vegetable and restaurant history.

Did you know the Fabbro family brought zucchinis to Melbourne? This is documented in an interview with Maurie in the local newspaper *The Valley Weekly* on 21 June 2006 (in which a photo of Maurie was front page, with the article on page 5).

Maurie also harvested from around him. Farmer and forager, he collected water cress out of the deep dirt graded gutters along Ely Street, near Eltham High School. The water cress was washed and taken to market for sale.



Maurie Fabbro

Photograph - Darren Howe
The Valley Weekly - 21 June 2006

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Memories and anecdotes of Mario (Maurie/Maurice) Fabbro *(continued from page 4)*

One of the saddest stories is the year Maurie ploughed in five acres of mature sweetcorn. It was simply more expensive to pick it and take it to market than the price it was fetching. My family, friends and chickens heavily benefited, though Maurie's toil, seed, water and time had been wasted for market.

In 1993 Maurie finally sold most of Fabbro farm to developers. They had been hounding him for years. He had a stack of real estate cards nearly 2 feet high on his dresser. Each week there would be one or more real estate agents or would-be developer knock on the door and yarn with Maurie, often over a cuppa at his kitchen table.

The hill eventually went to housing. The paddocks opposite, along Falkiner Street ended up with Eltham Shire Council to extend the riverside environmental lands.

However, Maurie retained the Bell Street paddocks and kept farming them with the old tractor and by hand, despite his newfound millions from the land sale. Maurie never wanted to sell. He just couldn't farm and maintain all that land any more. Plus the property, rated by Council over years as residential, simply cost more than he earned with a small truck of produce at market each week.

The river flats along Bell Street are prime alluvial market garden land, being continually farmed from at least 1933 until Maurie Fabbro passed away in 2009.

I would love to see Fabbro Fields have some environmental, farming, food or Indigenous community purpose.... and keep some of the legacy of the Fabbro family alive.

Early Settlers House, Ely Street, Eltham

Russell Yeoman

This article about another early Eltham cottage is from the EDHS Newsletter No. 6, May 1979

The society has been recently involved in moves to preserve an old timber dwelling in Ely Street, overlooking the Eltham High School. An application has been made to Historic Buildings Preservation Council for inclusion of the building in the Register of Historic Buildings and approaches have been made to the Shire of Eltham and the land owner regarding preservation of the house.

The land on which the house stands is to be subdivided into residential lots. The owner, Cronus Pty. Ltd., has now offered the building and the land on which it stands to the Council free of charge, subject to certain minor modifications to the subdivision. The Council has agreed to support the modification and the chances of preservation of the building and the majority of its out buildings on their present site are considered to be quite good.

Considerable research into the history of the building has been carried out on behalf of the Historic Buildings Preservation Council. It is believed that origins of the building are still somewhat obscure but full details of the research results have not yet ascertained. The matter of inclusion in the Register is still under consideration.



Falkiner Cottage, also known as Maynard's Cottage - c1979
Photograph - EDHS collection*

The land on which the house stands is within the Crown Township of Eltham and was known as cultivation allotment 3 with an area of just over 1 ha. This lot comprises only about one quarter of the land to be subdivided. This land was sold by the Crown in 1852 to Charles Brown, a stock commission agent of Bourke Street, Melbourne, for nine pounds fifteen shillings.

Brown apparently did not live on the land and probably bought it and other nearby land for speculative purposes. The land was soon sold to one Frederick Edward Falkiner who had occupied the area prior to the land sales and had bought one of the cultivation allotments (C.A. 17) without having to compete at public auction. The reason for the purchase of C A 17 in this manner was that improvements on the property were regarded as the property of Falkiner. according to Surveyor Hurst (son of Henry of Hurstbridge fame). The improvements comprised "1 ½ acres of cultivation, a very dilapidated; five-roomed hut of sawn slabs, also a rough hut used as a dairy, total value 30 pounds."



Falkiner Cottage, also known as Maynard's Cottage - c1979
Photograph - EDHS collection*

The house which we are now interested in preserving was apparently built or shifted to the site by Falkiner probably in the 1850's. Suggestions that it was previously a school have not been supported by any available evidence. The house was owned by the Falkiner family until the 1920s when it was bought by Mr. R. Maynard, who recently sold the land to the present owners.

The most significant participant in the history of this house is Frederick Falkiner and it is appropriate to record some further details of his residence in this area. Falkiner came to Port Phillip in October 1836 and began business as a horse dealer. He purchased his pastoral run on the lower Diamond Creek in 1847 from Joseph Wilson who in turn purchased it from Henry Foley in 1845. Foley was the original occupier of this area in 1840. These purchases were of course before the original freehold land sales and involved only squatting rights or leasehold land together with any improvements. In 1849 Falkiner applied for three 640 acre leases in the Parish of Nillumbik. Also in that year Mr. John Semar who held a licence to depasture stock on the run known as "Semars" or "Arthur" on the Diamond Creek requested that the licence be transferred to "Alex Falconer of Melbourne". This person may well have been Frederick Falkiner.

Falkiner's name appears from time to time in various records of the area. In 1868 a complaint was made by Thomas Sweeney and others that Falkiner was impounding their cattle. In 1854 Falkiner was appointed Eltham's first postmaster, a position which he held for just over a year. The existing house may well have been the first post office. Also in that year Falkiner complained about the Building Committee of the Little Eltham School, a complaint deemed "frivolous and vexatious" by the Rev. Goodman of Heidelberg. In 1858 he was fined five pounds for carelessly setting fire to his stubble yet in the same year he was auditor of the accounts of the Eltham District Road Board.

The present Falkiner Street adjoins Falkiner's original crown grant.

Main source: Much of this information has been obtained from original material researched by Mr. K. Chappel

After months of toing and froing the house at Eltham was finally ready to move into. The VW Beetle was loaded to the max, the furniture removalist van bulged with our worldly belongings and my family of five left the city to start a new life, come what may.

My parents' idea began in 1963, the year Beatlemania hit the world. My little battery transistor radio became an appendage, glued to my ear as my hips and feet took on a life independent from the rest of me. My parents laughed at their daughter, but they yeah, yeah, yeahed along with everyone else. Mum and Dad decided to remove their family from a cityscape life to Eltham, a small, leafy town on Melbourne's outskirts. Home to artists, bohemians and hippies. These days that would be called a tree change. Back then it was considered lunacy.

My parents didn't consult with their children on the proposed move. We were told. They'd bought an acre of land in Eltham and intended to build a new home. But why? My Dad would simply shrug his shoulders in answer. From overheard snippets of conversations from behind closed doors I understood my mother's indomitable will had worn down my father's resolve to live his life out in inner city Coburg.

Most Sundays we'd scramble into the VW and drive to Eltham to check out the block or talk to the builder cum architect. The block was big and covered in kunzea, a local native plant that flowered profusely in summer with a myriad of small white blooms. It was a dense covering, itched our arms when we walked through the foliage to the dam at the bottom of the block. Then Dad worked as accountant/secretary for a concrete company. He'd swing past a concrete plant during the week and collect concrete test tubes, which he'd bash into the dam edge to stop it eroding.

Building the house was slow going. The plans had to be discussed, then drawn up, finance found, council permits obtained and labourers engaged. Building materials were in short supply at the time, so many visits to the wreckers' yards were required to obtain sufficient second-hand material for the build to begin. Our parents often took us to the architect's home in Eltham. Mr Knox, or Alistair to my parents, and his wife Margot had a tribe of children who were told to keep us amused. Those kids had a swing in the backyard, which we three argued over. We were poles apart those Knox kids and we Zulls. But we muddled along together until the Knox children lost interest in us whilst our parents sat and listened to Alistair wax lyrical and we waited to go home.

He was enthusiastic alright. I sat for a while during one of the meetings, still and quiet as a good child should be. Mr Knox talked and talked but said little of the plans for the house or a schedule or anything of import relative to my parents' investment. Every time my parents steered the conversation toward the very reason they were there, Mr Knox would head off in another direction, usually around the activities of his church. Mrs Knox, Margot, came in and sat down on a foot stool. She had long dark tresses, an olive complexion, glamour personified, everything my mother was not. She exuded a queenly confidence and her mere presence intimidated. My father was so against smoking and was horrified when Margot produced a cigarette in a holder and smouldered away. I was mesmerised. My mother poked me hard and I left as quietly as I entered.



The bush block
Photograph - Sue Bennett



Dam at the front of the property
Photograph - Sue Bennett

Our Town – Part 1

(continued from page 7)

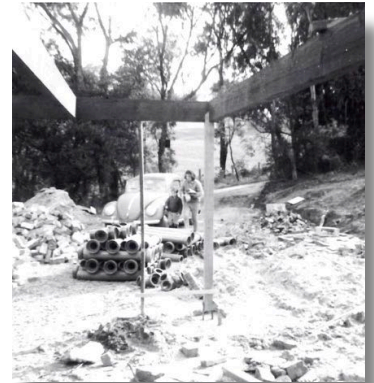
The build progressed and our trips to Eltham become more regular. The house had a concrete floor and a roof, but no windows. Outside was a mess of wet, sticky clay that made access to the house difficult. Feet sunk deep into the clay and shoes got left behind when walking through it. My father bought second hand bricks and began to pave them over the quagmire outside. But his efforts were stymied by a bout of sciatica which felled him. He'd drive us to Eltham in considerable discomfort. Mother would set up an old camp stretcher and my father would lay on it for hours until it was time to go back to the city.

My father dispensed orders from his stretcher and had Mum working like a Trojan. Too bad if she was tired and unhappy. She worked too during the week, but from the bungalow in Brunswick. The New Idea, a woman's magazine would send her the galley for the week's short story and she would illustrate an appropriate picture. At the new house jobs had to be done if we were ever to leave Brunswick.

Our living quarters were cramped in Brunswick, so it was always with relief when we went to Eltham for the day. Mum gave up on picnic lunches and instead gave us money to spend at the bakery. This was a fair walk from our house block, up the steepest hill on Metery Road, across the intersection of Lavender Park Road, then up and down Metery Road as it ran alongside the cemetery. Sometimes we left the dirt and dust of Metery Road and walked along the wide bushy nature strip where we found orchids, green hoods and brown hoods, donkey and spider orchids, milk maids and chocolate flowers, clematis, purple sarsaparilla, running postman, the long, red bell-shaped blooms of the wild correas and yellow everlasting daisies and billy buttons. It was difficult not to fill my arms with these treasures and bring home a posy for our mother, but I sensed it wasn't the right thing to do and left them be. If we weren't that hungry we'd walk through the cemetery and read inscriptions on the graves for a while until our stomachs rumbled. We'd turn onto the bitumen of Mt Pleasant Road, walk down the hill, then up a steep driveway to Mrs Mitchell's bakery. We were always greeted with the yeasty smell of baking bread. Our mouths watered with anticipation.

Mrs Mitchell was a dour sort, portly with dead straight hair, heavy black glasses and always had a flour-dusted apron tied around her ample waist. She never cracked a smile, just carried a resigned weight-of-the-world air on her shoulders. She moved slowly, worried over her pies, her white-haired, toothless and much older husband and watched us children with hawk eyes. Her daughter Jenni was a demanding little girl and would interrupt when Mrs Mitchell took customer orders. We were in awe of this woman who gave her child attention before us. Put us in the same situation and our mother would tell us to wait our turn.

The bakery was in the front of the Mitchell's home. You had to climb steep stairs up to a balcony and then open a flimsy fly wire door into what once must have been a lounge room. There was a makeshift counter where you were served from and behind that a waist high wall divided the kitchen from the service area. A noisy, glass-door fridge offered an assortment of Coca-Cola bottles that weren't always ice-cold. You could see the ovens and huge table where Mrs Mitchell rolled out the pastry for her meat pies. We'd watch her deftly roll up the pastry around a rolling pin, place the pastry over pie-baking trays then spoon in a pale and insipid looking sauce. Thankfully the cooked pies tasted better than the filling looked, but the Coca-Cola always left my teeth feeling chalky and stomach queasy. Or maybe it was the pies.



A muddy mess
Photograph - Sue Bennett

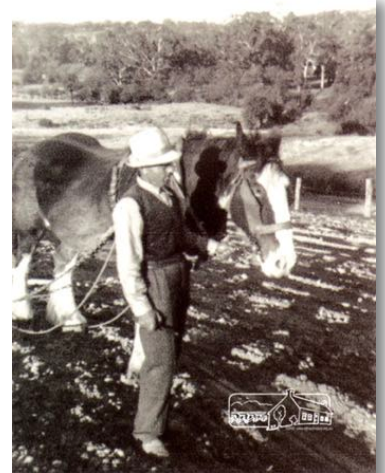


Eltham Cemetery gate
Photograph - EDHS collection*

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

Guido Quarto Fabbro

Guido Fabbro came to Eltham in 1933 and built a large Italianesque house on the western side of Falkiner Street, on a block extending to Ely and Porter Streets which had formerly been an orchard and dairy farm. The original 1860s cottage on the property was relocated to the back of the block and was rented out (once to Alistair and Margot Knox). Guido also purchased land extending to the Diamond Creek on the eastern side of Falkiner Street and on the eastern side of Bell Street (opposite Eltham High School). The riparian soil was suitable for market gardening: Guido grew mainly tomatoes, but also pumpkins, cauliflowers, cabbages, peas, beans, lettuce, beetroot and zucchinis. Even the land surrounding the house was used. The produce was carted to Melbourne overnight for sale at the market.



Guido Fabbro with Clydesdale
Photograph - EDHS collection*

Guido died in 1970 and is buried with his wife Regina at Eltham Cemetery. His son Maurie continued in his father's footsteps until 2007, principally growing artichokes in later years. The land on the eastern side of Falkiner Street now forms part of a Council reserve called "Barak Bushland", the land on the western side having been sold off for residential subdivision. The Bell Street land is now public open space managed by Nillumbik Shire Council and called "Fabbro Fields". There have been recent proposals to develop the site for sporting purposes or as a dog park or community garden.

Sources: Diamond Valley News 12th June 1984 and an interview with Russell Yeoman 2019

Gordon Craig Ford

Gordon Ford was a conservationist and a pioneer of natural-style landscaping. He came to Eltham in 1948 and bought a block of land in John Street extending through to Pitt Street; artist Peter Glass lived opposite in John Street. Early on, Gordon worked for Alistair Knox on construction of the mud-brick Busst house amongst others. At the same time, with the help of friends including artist Clifton Pugh, he progressively built his own house "Füllung", which "grew like Topsy" utilising a variety of second-hand materials.



Gordon Ford - Photograph - State Library Victoria

But his main focus, which became his life-long occupation, was garden landscaping. Inspired by Edna Walling and Ellis Stones, he sought to reflect the bush settings of rural Victoria where he had grown up. Commissions included Monash University and countless industrial sites, but designing for the archetypal quarter-acre block gave him the most satisfaction. He had a huge impact on the look of gardens in Australia from the 1950s, creating seemingly natural bush environments by carefully integrating indigenous and exotic plantings.

Gordon died in 1999 and his remains are interred beside the Ashes Walk at Eltham Cemetery, marked by a plaque. A separate plaque notes his landscaping design work within the cemetery grounds and at Alistair Knox Park.

Main sources: "Nillumbik Now and Then" by Marguerite Marshall and an article in "Landscape Australia" (1992)

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

*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

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