



## An Historical Experience

Jim Connor

In 1918 during the final months of World War 1 the world was rocked by the Spanish Influenza epidemic, which was estimated to have infected 500 million people globally, with deaths thought to be between 20 and 50 million people. While generally known as the 'Spanish Flu' it is now considered unlikely the virus originated in Spain.

In response, Victoria went into a complete lock down early in 1919. Public buildings were shut, long distance train travel restricted, public meetings prohibited and the border closed between Victoria and New South Wales. This pandemic was highly infectious and about 12,500 people died in Australia, mostly young, healthy adults between the ages of 20 and 30 years old. It was an international disaster, impacting locally.



A group of people taking precautions against the Spanish Flu  
Photograph - Internet source

Now, some 100 years later we are confronted with the potentially deadly COVID-19 virus spreading havoc around the world, with Australia managing through this ordeal better than most other countries. Again it is a wide reaching international disaster, played out locally.

In 1919 there was limited recording of details about this pandemic, or the existence of many photographs depicting day to day impacts on individuals. Communications were different and medical knowledge limited. Today, various forms of media are providing saturation coverage of all aspects of this global crisis, while extensive attempts are being made to discover a vaccine.

Like many individuals and organisations, the Eltham District Historical Society has had to make substantial changes to the way we operate and communicate with our members. Our Local History Centre is not able to be accessed for safety reasons, under instructions from Nillumbik Shire Council, our Annual General Meeting has been deferred and any planned meetings or excursions have not been able to proceed. We appreciate that some members of our Collections Team have continued scanning and cataloguing photographs and records at their homes. Our members have been encouraged to record their experiences and collect relevant photographs or other information sources, as these will all evidence part of our local history going forward.

While we are in the midst of a unique experience, we look forward to the time we can meet again. In the meantime please continue to take precautions and stay safe.

*(Parts 1 and 2 of Sue's story in earlier newsletters are on the EDHS website at [www.ethamhistory.org.au](http://www.ethamhistory.org.au))*

The days went on by. Summer came and with it terrible fires that ringed Eltham and burnt out acres of surrounding bushland and Laughing Waters on the Yarra (March 1965). The air was dense with smoke, the sun a red orb hanging low in the sky. My father came home from work early to help fight the fires. He didn't have to go far as the paddock across the road from our house ignited and sent flames soaring into tree tops. We jammed tennis balls in the house roof down-pipes, filled the gutters with water and generally fireproofed the house as best we could.



Aftermath of bushfire - Laughing Waters Road, 1965  
Photograph - George W. Bell - EDHS collection

Lucky for us the blaze didn't jump the road and was contained quickly. The other fires were devastating. Buildings and homes were destroyed and lives were lost. The smoke haze stayed with us for days and a smell like a doused camp fire filled our nostrils and permeated our clothes.

Grade 6 was a transition year. You were a senior student and expected to conduct yourself appropriately. The irony was next year you would be a junior student when you moved onto to high school. Mr Tyers, the deputy principal, believed the way forward was to learn the times tables by heart and to recite each one accurately in under 12-seconds. He'd take his watch off his wrist, place it on his desk, wait for the second hand to reach 12 on the watch face and then you had to go for it. Once 12 is twelve. Two twelves are 24. Three 12s are 36 and so on.

The girls were chosen over the boys in the class to be the bell monitors and kitchen monitors. Boys were usually chosen to make up ink to fill the ink wells in the desk or to haul the milk crates around. The Government used to provide all school children with a bottle of milk daily, and you were expected to be grateful and drink the stuff, whether it was curdled from the summer day's sun or not. Waste not want not was the catch phrase of the day, perhaps a remanent from the last war when food was in scarce supply. I eventually wore my mother down and she wrote a letter to the school advising I was no longer to be given milk.

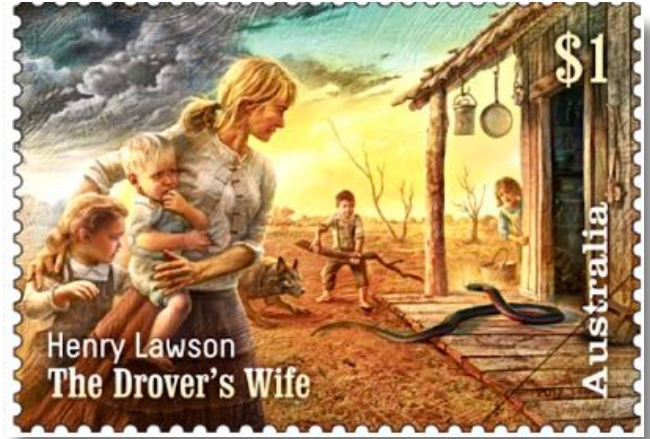
Being a kitchen monitor was considered a great privilege. You had to clean up after the teachers; wash their dirty cups and saucers, bin their rubbish, sweep up their droppings and fill the urn up. Cup dregs were poured into one cup. I don't know why. We just did it that way. Down the sink would have been better. One afternoon my co-monitor and I watched horrified as the school principal came into the rec-room, eyed the dregs cup and asked us if we'd made the cup of tea especially for him. Before we could answer, he drank it down and declared it was the best cuppa he'd ever had.

Washing the dishes, I had a moment of lapsed concentration when my wrist connected with the hot urn irrationally placed next to the sink. My skin blistered over a wide area. Off to the sick bay, burn slathered in Savlon, the go to topical antiseptic remedy of the '60s, arm bandaged up and I was sent home. The burn hurt as they do. I cried all the way home into the arms of my mother who wasn't one for much sympathy. My arm still bears the scar.



Mr Shaw was the school librarian, ran inter school sports days as well as accompanying students on their camps. We played a bat and ball game called rounders, similar to baseball, but with a bat like a miniature cricket bat and an oversized tennis ball. Mr Shaw would bundle as many children as he could and then more into his car and drive us to various schools to play rounders, or in winter, netball. Back then it wasn't a win at any cost attitude but one of sportsmanship, camaraderie and general good fun.

Mr Shaw used to read short stories to his library class. Good Australian stories like Henry Lawson's *The Drover's Wife* and *The Loaded Dog*. There was one story in particular I remember about the adventures of a clumsy boy who managed to spill silver nitrate over himself, which when exposed to light makes your skin black. Somehow, the boy locked himself out of his home stark naked. It was a hilarious story, but sadly the title and author have been lost to me over time. I guess Mr Shaw hoped to instil a love of Australian literature into our psyche. It worked for me.



"The Drover's Wife", immortalised in an Australian postage stamp

One year we had a school camp and several grades bused it to Harrietville, a small town on the Great Alpine Road at the foot of Mt Hotham. The air was fresh and sharp with the beginnings of a winter to come, our cheeks ruddy from running wildly around outside. There was nothing much there at Harrietville, other than a dormitory with space enough for the forty or so children who went and a kitchen with enough space to seat us all. Many of us had our first taste of oxtail soup on that trip. It didn't go down very well but as well brought up children do, they ate it. Mr Shaw brought along his wife and children. Mrs Shaw was very kind and tucked each of us into our bed and kissed us goodnight.

The summer before I started high school a new family moved into the area, the Scotts. A neighbour suggested I ride my bike around to introduce myself. I lacked the confidence to knock on the front door and instead rode up and down their road and very slowly past the house. Eventually a girl came out on her bike and rode along beside me. We just pedalled, then talked and compared bikes. Susan's had gears. Mine didn't, so I had to work much harder up the hills. Susan and I were inseparable that summer break. We spent hours together huddled in her bedroom or mine, on our bikes, on foot. We knew no limit. We wanted to be everything and anything, be everywhere possible and do the impossible. The Yarra River was a great place to do just that.

The fire station and Shire Hall were demolished to make way for a supermarket. The hardware store, Clintons, where my Dad bought nails and screws scooped from a box into a heavy paper bag moved on from Main Road. The post office was revamped, the dirt roads were levelled and bitumen laid, the bush nature strips were flattened and replaced with concrete footpaths, kerb and channel. The Eltham of the future would become just another outer Melbourne suburb, albeit minus the triple fronted brick veneer homes of the '60s.



Early Fire Station - Main Road Eltham  
Photograph - EDHS Collection

....the final part of Sue's story will be in our next newsletter

## Eltham Shire Memorial Park

*From Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser and Diamond Creek Valley Advocate September 9th 1921*

The site acquired for a Memorial Park by the Eltham Shire Council in honor of those who fought and died for their Country is an ideal one. From it may be seen one of the finest panoramic views in the country. The park is situated on Garden Hill, Kangaroo Ground, and from it the very limits of the Shire of Eltham can be seen, and far beyond. The view on the north and east extends to the Dividing Range and the Dandenong Ranges. In other directions the view extends as far as the eye can reach. On Saturday, 3rd inst., (September 1921), the Park was officially opened by Mr W. H. Everard, M.L.A., and with him was Mr A. Cameron, M.L.A., son of the late Mr E. H. Cameron, who had lived for many years in close proximity to the now Memorial Park.

Mr John Bell, J.P., introduced Mr Everard, saying he was not altogether a stranger. It was their intention to ask Mr Everard to perform the ceremony whether he had been returned as their member or not. Mr Everard said he took it as a great compliment to be asked to open the Park. He also took it as a great compliment to have the company of the late Mr E.H. Cameron's son. He also wished to thank Cr Bradbury, who had brought them along in his car to help at this important ceremony. He understood the site was obtained at the instigation of Mr W. A. D. Wippell, the same gentleman assisting generously with his purse. The Council could be commended for wisely taking steps to make the site a national undertaking in honour of those boys who enlisted from the Shire and fell in the great cause for liberty.

Shire Councillors often get more kicks than half-pence, but in future people will look back and thank them, also the people who assisted, when they look up at the Memorial Park. It would be an everlasting reminder of those who gave their very all that our country may be free to govern ourselves. The Park stood for nobility of purpose. It would stir up the noble instinct in us all to do what was right and honourable. In time the district would become more populated, and in those days people who come along will bless the magnificent sight reserved. Mr Everard said he did not wish to recall sad memories, but spoke of the gallant deeds, of our men at Gallipoli. Such memorials would remind us of the little white marks on the other side of the world, and stimulate the incentive in us all to do what was right and noble.



Shire of Eltham War Memorial unveiled on 11 November 1926 in the Memorial Park  
Photograph - EDHS collection

A former Governor of Victoria desired the site for residential purposes, and prior to leaving for the old country said the spot would be one that he would never forget. Recently on a tour of inspection with Sir Alexander Peacock he (Mr Everard) had made it his business to stop and show Sir Alex, the magnificent view. The Minister for Education was greatly impressed, and said the Council and people deserve every credit for acquiring such a site. In conclusion Mr Everard asked Mr T. Scarce to hoist the flag on the staff erected. This was done, and the flag fluttered out gaily and triumphantly in the slight breeze. Mr A. Cameron, M.L.A., endorsed the eloquent sentiments expressed by Mr Everard regarding our boys on the battle field, and praised the fine panoramic view. It was 80 years since the old residents came to Kangaroo Ground. Garden Hill was their land-mark. Old residents would be proud that the site was now reserved for a Memorial Park. Mr Wippell and the councillors could be commended for their public-spiritedness in obtaining such a grand everlasting memorial. Mr Bell moved a vote of thanks to the visitors, recalling at the same time how the name Kangaroo Ground originated.



## Eltham Shire Memorial Park

(continued from page 4)

He also congratulated Mr Everard on his success at the election. Mr Everard, in responding, said 82 heroes had put No.1 to his name at Kangaroo Ground, and a hero of heroes had put No. 2 against his name. (Laughter). He was sure it must have been a lady, for all the ladies wore a guilty look. (Laughter). During his campaign he did not visit Kangaroo Ground, yet he only lost a vote. At the next election he would not visit any place. (Laughter). Mr Everard said Mr Lawson had put up a great fight, and though the verdict went slightly against him, yet there was a following who would say "Well done, you have done good work."

"In spite of parties and wheat pools surely a combination could be formed to go on with the good work of the country-a ministry which would be free from any socialistic leader." Preferably for a leader he (Mr Everard) would say Mr Lawson. He stood for liberal legislation. It was essential that parties joined more together to work for the good of Victoria. Thanking the people for their support Mr Everard trusted that their confidence in him would not be misplaced while he represented the fair district of Evelyn. A vote of thanks was passed to the Mess Bros. for selling land at a reasonable figure. A portion of the Park was given gratis by Mrs White, late of Kangaroo Ground, for the good purpose.

The National Anthem was sung, and after the partaking of afternoon tea, provided by the ladies, the memorable ceremony closed.

*Source: From ELTHAM SHIRE MEMORIAL PARK. (1921, September 9). Eltham and Whittlesea Shires Advertiser and Diamond Creek Valley Advocate (Vic. : 1917 - 1922), p. 3. [www.trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/57640186](http://www.trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/57640186)*

## Lots of Rubbish

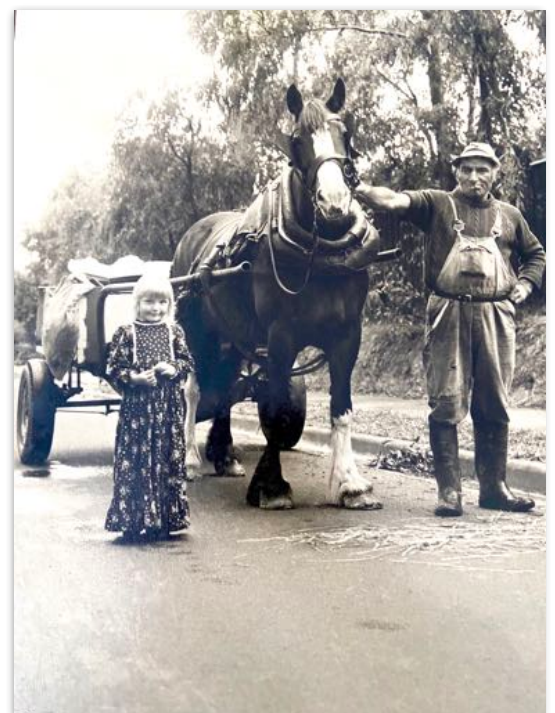
Jim Connor

History is often about change and we experience this all around us, even with such basic services about how our rubbish is collected and even how our streets are cleaned.

Many people will remember putting out the sometimes battered steel or plastic rubbish bin to be collected by the 'garbos' as they rushed down the street and at times precariously hung off the back of a Council truck. They often seemed to be in a hurry as they grabbed a bin, tossed the contents into the truck and then went off on their merry way. Now, we need to decide which large coloured plastic 'wheely' bin to put out to be picked up by a mechanical arm extending from the truck, while the driver is ensconced in his cabin. Today they rarely handle the bins.

Large street sweeper trucks clean the streets, often while we sleep, whereas in the past it was indeed very different. When Montmorency was part of the Shire of Eltham, prior to the municipal restructure in 1994, there was one Council employee who was particularly well known in the area. This was Joe Buhagier, a unique and interesting sight, who with his trusty horse walked and cleaned the local streets.

Lyn and Graeme Hardiman remember him as a private person and Lyn would often talk with him each time he came along Rattray Road. One day he reluctantly agreed to have his photograph taken with their daughter Danielle, who was about 5 years old at the time, though he was a little embarrassed about all the fuss. Joe features in the Were Street footpath mosaics showing some of the well-known local Montmorency characters.



Joe Buhagier and Danielle Hardiman  
Photograph - Gordon Allingham  
From Graeme and Lyn Hardiman

Recently Wendy and I found in among all the historic material we are trying to put in order, a three page hand written letter by Matcham Skipper. It had been torn in halves and I have put it back together and typed out its contents.

It seems to me to be a draft and I have a memory of him giving it to me to comment on as he sometimes discussed his projects with me. Matcham's letter to the Shire of Eltham Bicentennial Committee in the early 1980s is as follows and the ultimate outcome of his approach is the wonderful sculpture of Alan Marshall, which was created later by Matcham's son, Marcus Skipper, with assistance from others at Montsalvat. It was installed outside the Eltham Library in 1995.

*The Eltham Shire Bicentennial Committee*

*Dear Sir*

*May I put a proposition the Bicentennial Committee that could be an inspiration, give pleasure to the children and the future occupants of the Eltham district.*

*I've always felt the ethos of Eltham could be best represented by a symbol of its faithful connection with the Arts. A worthy subject for this idea would be Alan Marshall who not only has a degree of international recognition but strikes a cord in the hearts of most Australians having become a living legend in his own lifetime.*

*He lived and worked in Eltham during is most prolific years and exuded a great warmth for the environment, the people and Ethos of the area and has been, and will remain, a source of inspiration for many people because of his courage in over coming his early disabilities (Polio), all of which makes him an excellent subject for a bronze sculpture near the Yabbie Hole (I can jump puddles)? in the Eltham Common. #*

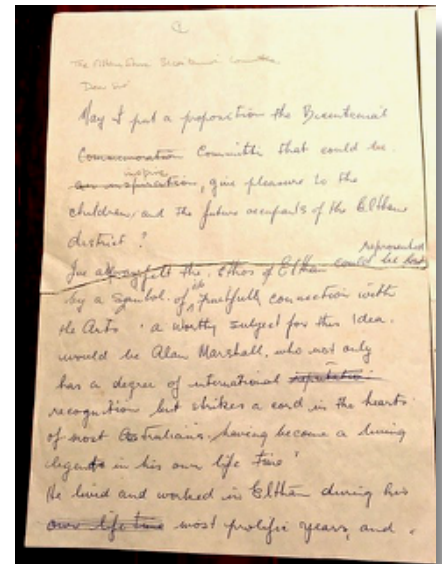
*I can see him leaning against a natural Rock with his harmonica in one hand, his crutches by his side, with animated face about to launch on another of his notable yarns to a couple of enthralled children.*

*It would be simple and conceived as a peoples' sculpture, impressive without heroics or pomposity but human, set modestly in its surroundings as a reminder that there is still humour, empathy and a good yarn left in this fast world.*

*To produce a life size bronze, vandal proof and permanent can all be achieved with local facilities and artisans. I can personally supervise the whole process from modelling, moulding, casting and patinating, having worked in bronze over many periods of my life and having just finished a years work in life size bronzes to familiarise myself with the latest technical developments in Italy.*

*I hope the seeds of this concept fires your imagination. It has infinite possibilities if a business in Eltham sponsored a sculpture year we could produce a whole Vigeland Park of Sculpture as in Norway.*

*Yours Faithfully, Matcham Skipper*



Matcham Skipper's  
hand written letter - page 1  
Photograph - Michael Wilson



Marcus Skipper's  
sculpture of Alan Marshall  
Photograph - Jim Connor

# The Eltham Library is now located  
on what was known as the Eltham Common



## The 2nd Eltham Sea Scout Group

The 2nd Eltham Sea Scout Group has been an important part of our community for 62 years. Our youth members are aged 6-25 years old and cover all sections: Joeys, Cubs, Scouts, Venturers and Rovers.

The term "Sea Scouts" is somewhat misleading: we're really just Scouts who love water and our boating activities can be on the sea, lakes or rivers. We mainly boat locally, on the Yarra River and Sugarloaf Reservoir, but we also go on exciting river canoe and raft trips and participate in Sea Scout regattas, state-wide.

Sea Scouting has been around since 1907, when the Scouting movement started. In 2012, Sea Scouts was established as a specialist branch. Sea Scouts do all the other activities that other Scout groups do, learning life skills and becoming good citizens through fun and adventure. We offer extra opportunities to our youth members, however, through our expertise and our fleet of canoes, sailing boats, kayaks and a motorised rescue boat. Boating is exhilarating and empowering for our youth members and also develops team work, awareness and attention to detail. We follow rigorous safety protocols: our boating leaders are highly trained, our fleet is audited annually and our youth members are rigorously assessed for competence. Besides, boating and being on and in water is huge fun!



A sailboat from the 2nd Eltham Sea Scout Group at the recent Looking Back, Looking Forward Exhibition  
Photograph - Jim Connor

Our group started in 1957 as a Roman Catholic Scout Group supported by Our Lady Help of Christians in Eltham. In 1959, the six older Scouts became Sea Scouts, at their own request. The boys helped build a hut on the property of John Maltha, their leader and were invested there, with hurricane lamps as the only light source. They built their own catamaran and rowboat and helped build a boat shed at Sweeneys Lane near the Yarra River. Then they set about raising funds to acquire boats and equipment. A few years later, all the Group members became Sea Scouts, adding sailing and boating to their other outdoor activities and providing a point of difference from the well-established 1st Eltham Scout Group.

In 1965, the Group severed its connection with the Our Lady Help of Christians Church and became an open group that any boy could join. In the 70's and 80's, girls and young women joined us, as Australian Scouting became open to youth members of any gender.

By 1974, our Group had a busy program of camping and boating and had its own hall, an ex-army hut that had been cut in two and transported from North Melbourne. It was reassembled on land leased from the Council in Handfield Street, next to the Diamond Creek in Eltham, and has since been extended and recently renovated. Our hall and boat sheds are tucked into what is now a charming bush clearing, which is often used by locals as a peaceful lunch spot.

Over the decades, many hundreds of local families have been involved with 2nd Eltham Sea Scouts and we pay tribute to all the leaders, parents, youth members and others who have worked so hard to provide children and young people in Eltham with opportunities for fun, adventure, service and personal growth through Scouting activities, especially those outdoors and on the water. In particular, for over ten years in the 70's and 80's Ted Reaks was an inspiring Group Leader, with tireless energy, dedication and resourcefulness. Our local business community has also been very supportive, especially in providing materials for our building works.

## The 2nd Eltham Sea Scout Group

(continued from page 7)

Our 2nd Eltham Sea Scouts Group is diverse and inclusive. We're welcoming and friendly and a second family for some. Through the education of young people with fun, adventurous and outdoor activities, we're proud as Scouts to be helping build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society.

After 62 years, we're still going strong. We welcome new youth members and members of the community. There are so many ways you can help, short-term or long-term. You don't need to be a boatie either – many of our group are land lubbers. For more information, see <http://elthamseascouts.org.au/index.html> or call 0403 173533.

Source: This article was provided by the 2nd Eltham Sea Scouts Group

## Evelyn Colin Falkiner

Richard Pinn

One of the streets in Eltham is believed to be named after Evelyn Colin Falkiner - but it's not Falkiner Street....and as there's no Evelyn Street or Colin Street in Eltham, so that's a bit of a riddle, isn't it?

Falkiner Street is named after his father, Frederick Edward Falkiner. In 1840 he was appointed Chief Constable for Melbourne, but was obliged to resign due to complaints about his bad temper and excessive use of force. In 1846 he moved to what is now Eltham South and took up farming alongside the Diamond Creek. He is regarded as Eltham's first postmaster (probably self-appointed), operating from a hut on his property in 1854-55. When the Victorian Government sought applications for the official position of postmaster in 1855, both Frederick Falkiner and storekeeper Thomas Hunniford applied. Falkiner claimed that Hunniford was a "bad character who habitually sold sly grog". Hunniford sued Falkiner for slander, won the case, was awarded £100 damages (seems excessive!) and was appointed postmaster.

Frederick Falkiner did not get on well with his neighbours. In 1868 he impounded a neighbour's horse which had strayed onto his property and demanded payment for its release. Later in the same year, he impounded another neighbour's cows which had strayed onto his property and again demanded payment for their release. But the tables were turned in 1869, when one of Falkiner's pigs strayed onto a third neighbour's property. This time, the neighbour immediately took the pig to the Council pound; Falkiner claimed that he should have been given the chance to rescue it first.

When Frederick died in 1881, his son Evelyn inherited some of the land. In 1889 he was charged with assaulting youths whom he caught damaging his cherry trees, and in 1928 two youths were charged with stealing quinces from his property. But Evelyn's most significant act was in 1925, when he sold part of his land to the Council (for £900) for a proposed Higher Elementary School (now Eltham High School). That takes us back to the street - name riddle. It is reputed that Evelyn was known as Ely. One of the streets running past Eltham High School is Ely Street.

Evelyn is buried in Eltham Cemetery, as are a brother and a sister. Frederick's place of burial has not been determined.

Main sources: Several articles from The Argus and the Hurstbridge Advertiser; article on stampboards.com.



Falkiner Cottage - 8 Ely Street, Eltham  
Photograph - May 1979 - EDHS collection

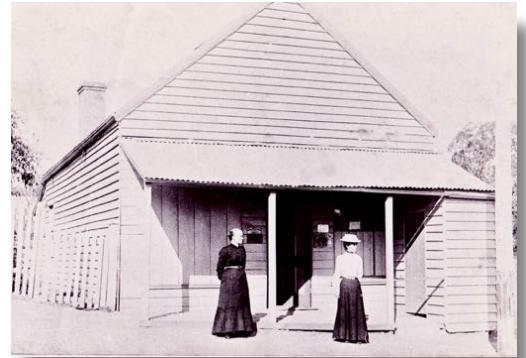


*These stories are part of a series about the lives of people interred at the Eltham Cemetery.*

### Anne Jane Hunniford

In 1855 Thomas Hunniford was appointed as Eltham's postmaster (replacing Frederick Falkiner). He operated the post office from his general store in Maria Street (now Main Road) near Bridge Street (originally facing Bridge Street but later altered to face Main Road).

His daughter Anne was a teacher at Eltham Primary School in her early adult years. She became postmistress in about 1880 and continued in that role until illness forced her to retire in 1928. She was succeeded by her nephew Neville Burgoyne whose family were then running the store, which had been rebuilt and modernised in 1926 to accommodate an expanded post and telegraph office.



Anne Hunniford and her mother  
Photograph - EDHS collection

Anne knew everyone and was respected for her kindly actions in her official and private capacities. In her time there was no official letter delivery to houses; residents were expected to collect their mail at the post office. But if an important letter or telegram arrived, Anne would try to find someone willing to deliver it.

Anne died in 1928, aged 73. She is buried in Eltham Cemetery with her mother and with a Burgoyne child born much later. Burgoyne's store was further extended in 1940 and still stands (currently empty), though is in the process of being redeveloped.

Main source: Obituary in Hurstbridge Advertiser 21st December 1928

### William Hill Irvine

Sir William Irvine sat in the Victorian Parliament (as Liberal Member for Lowan) from 1894 to 1906 and was Premier of Victoria from 1902 to 1904. He then switched to Federal politics and sat in the Commonwealth Parliament (as Liberal Member for Flinders) from 1906 to 1918. He was considered a potential Prime Minister, but his abrupt manner and hard-line conservatism (particularly his attitude to a railway strike) made him unacceptable even to many Liberals: he was known in Parliament as "Iceberg Irvine".

He lived at Richmond, but in 1908 purchased land in Laughing Waters Road at Eltham, where he built the house "Killeavey" as (initially) a weekend retreat. The site, a peninsula surrounded on three sides by the Yarra River, is of geological importance and has considerable cultural significance to the Wurundjeri.

In 1912 Sir William moved to Killeavey and in 1913 purchased more land, extending his property to Reynolds Road. In 1923 he shifted to Toorak, donating Killeavey to his daughter Beatrice as a wedding gift.

Sir William was a founding member of the RACV and was Acting Governor of Victoria from 1931 to 1934. He died in 1943 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Agnes.

Main sources: "Laughing Waters Road" by Jane Woollard and Wikipedia.



Sir William Irvine  
Photograph - Wikipedia

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### Contacts for the Eltham District Historical Society

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

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

### PLEASE NOTE

**Our postal address is now 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095, not PO Box 137 Eltham**

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