

Newsletter

No. 254 October 2020



Vale Mick Woiwod

Jim Connor

31 March 1929 – 26 August 2020

Mick, as he was usually known, grew up in Frankston, worked as a bricklayer for 40 years and had four children with his wife Margaret. They built their mud brick and timber home in the Bend of Islands; he said living there was the highlight of his life. They stayed for many years, before moving to Eltham, where Margaret passed away in 2012.

It wasn't until Mick was 60 years old that he enrolled in his first university degree, where his thesis on Christmas Hills evolved into his first book, "Once Around the Sugarloaf." Having never written anything until then, but having been an avid reader all his life of what had been referred to at the time as 'Australiana', he went on to become a respected author and local historian. Over many years Mick wrote more than 25 books and papers.

He comprehensively researched and wrote extensively about European settlement in the Eltham and Kangaroo Ground districts, particularly commenting on the resulting impact on the local Indigenous Wurundjeri clan. Mick was honoured with the name Murrup Ngooloo 'Spirit Voice'. His work helped raise the awareness of settlement activities of the early pioneers of the area, while concentrating on highlighting the adverse reactions their introduced lifestyles had on the original inhabitants.

In researching and recording this information, Mick's legacy is a valuable resource of local Indigenous history, culture and practices, particularly for current and future history researchers. His significant contributions also include the Birrarung and Corranderrk Databases he released for general access in 2012, which contain a wealth of researched information he had collected over more than 15 years.

Mick was a founding member of the Nillumbik Reconciliation Group and the Friends of the Wurundjeri group and was also on the Kangaroo Ground Memorial Park and Tower of Remembrance Advisory Committee. As a member of the Shire of Eltham Historical Society committee he, with other members, helped establish the Andrew Ross Museum at Kangaroo Ground in 1993. Mick and Margaret were honoured as joint Nillumbik Citizens of the Year in 2006.

Mick was a decisive initiator of change in respect of practices and attitudes towards our earliest inhabitants. He brought people and history into the landscape and truly was a local legend, who will be missed by his family, as well as many in our community and beyond.

Vale Mick



Since the earliest of the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions my wife Marion and I have been confining our exercise to walking in Eltham. Previously we would often walk in other parts of Melbourne or even further afield. As the restrictions continued and became more severe it was more difficult to find new routes and points of interest for our walks. We covered most streets and parks within the allowable walking time from home. Sometimes we would use our walks to check out email enquiries received by the Society, but this accounted for only a small proportion of our activities. Our interests in local history and the bushland environment were often our focus.

We have recorded on a map where we have walked during the lockdown. We now need to walk in areas we have already covered so we turned to maps to give some sort of purpose to our walks.

Places of heritage significance in the Shire of Nillumbik are covered by the Heritage Overlay under the Nillumbik Planning Scheme and these are identified by the planning scheme maps. Map 13HO covers central Eltham and identifies 57 places of heritage significance. Map 14HO to the east identifies a further 13. In addition, heritage places in the nearer parts of Montmorency and Lower Plenty are covered by overlays in the Banyule Planning Scheme, including Pecks Dam and the mud brick precinct in Napier Crescent.

And so, we have used these maps to make a number of these places as destinations for our walks. Although we are familiar with most of these places it was good to renew our interest. We have found a few that we were not aware of. Most of the places are visible from the street or other public areas. Many are private houses and we are always respectful of the privacy of the owners.

It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive list of heritage places. But for those interested in adopting this theme for their walks here are a few examples. Probably the most obvious is Alistair Knox Park, which has its own heritage overlay and is adjacent to other heritage places including Shillinglaw Cottage, the Eltham Library and the trestle bridge. Try walking to the bridge on the narrow foot track on the western side of the Diamond Creek.



Peck's Dam, Montmorency, c.1998

Photograph - EDHS collection



Alistair Knox Park c.2020

Photograph - Russell Yeoman



Eltham Trestle Bridge c.2015

Photograph - Jim Connor

The former Maroondah Aqueduct north of Research provides a longer walk of about 3.5 km each way on a good walking path.

The mud brick precinct around Diamond Street contains a number of interesting heritage listed houses built by John Harcourt, Alistair Knox and others. An unusual inclusion is the Smith dam at the corner of Karingal Drive and Nerreman Gateway and it is also worth visiting our Society's monument commemorating Victoria's 150th anniversary located in the grounds of the heritage listed Eltham Community and Reception Centre. There are a number of significant trees that have heritage overlays. One that we were not previously aware of is a large Canadian Poplar at the corner of Kent Hughes Road and Colquhoun Court.



D B Smith dam c.2013

Photograph - Jim Connor

The Heritage Overlay identifies places considered significant to the local area. Only a few of these are included in the Victorian Heritage Register as being significant to the State of Victoria. These include the former Eltham Courthouse and adjoining police residence, now our Society's Local History Centre. Also included are Montsalvat, St Margaret's Church, Southernwood, once the home of famous artist Walter Withers and the former Rice house in Ryans Road (not visible from the street).

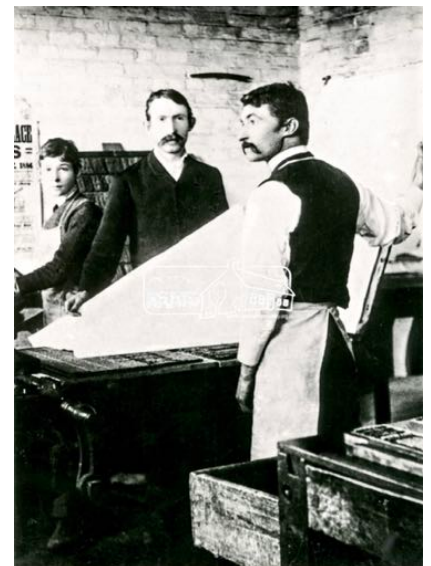
There are a number of bushland reserves around Eltham that are worth a visit. On the eastern edge of Eltham is the Pauline Toner Butterfly Reserve. Its main purpose is conservation of the endangered Eltham Copper Butterfly but in spring it presents a beautiful display of wildflowers. Other nearby butterfly reserves are also worth a visit.

We hope that this story will encourage members to use their exercise time during COVID to get out and explore Eltham's heritage. The heritage overlay maps are easily searchable online as is the schedule to the heritage overlay that provide addresses and information on what is significant. Additional information can also be found on the online Victorian Heritage Database.

This photo was published in "The Advertiser", Friday, February 16, 1934 following a fire which destroyed the Shire of Eltham Offices, formerly offices of the "Evelyn Observer", which became "The Advertiser".

Mr Robert Harris (centre) was associated with the paper for forty-seven years. The Printing office of the 'Evelyn Observer' at Kangaroo Ground operated from about 1872 until it became the 'Advertiser' and moved to Hurstbridge during the 1914-1918 war. The building was then used for the Shire Office.

Photograph - EDHS Collection* L-R: John Edward Greenaway (apprentice), R. C. Harris (editor) and James Foggie in the Printing Office of the Evelyn Observer, Kangaroo Ground in the 1880s.
Source: Mrs. McMinn, Kinglake



Spring turned to summer and the heat was on. Our school classrooms didn't have air-conditioning or a fan back then. The windows were open and useless in that airless Eltham dry heat. Hands would raise to swat blowflies milling around our eyes. Everyone was cranky and disinterested. We thermometer watched and waited until the mercury hit 100. Then the bell would sound and school was over for the day, no matter it was earlier than normal. My hatless brothers and I would trudge along the dusty, dirt road in that searing heat and hoped Mum would give us an icy pole each when we arrived home.

School finished for the year and summer holidays officially began. That was the summer before I started high school, the year I was a senior only to face being a junior again the next. It was a conflicting time. To keep us amused during the long break, Mum would sometimes give us a shilling each and we would walk the two miles to the local swimming pool. Roy, ruddy cheeked and rotund sat in the shade under the tin roof of his makeshift office. Sometimes a few of the older boys would sit with him. He'd look you up and down before he took your money and let you in. *No horseplay here, understand?* was his usual greeting as he elbowed the nearest boy.

You had to steel yourself to go in the girls' change rooms—another tin shed, wooden slats over a stained concrete floor, a rough bench along the length of the shed wall, nails hammered into the wall served as coat hooks. At one end of the shed a rickety door opened into a narrow area that had a slab of wood running its entire length with five evenly spaced cut outs the right size for a small bum to sit on over the pans underneath. The toilet. Communal like the Romans', but Romans we were not, just young girls who had been brought up to expect privacy and who avoided using that toilet like the plague. Some days, the stench that rose from those pans was so vile it was all you could do to not dry retch.



Eltham Swimming Pool Opening - 1936

Photograph - EDHS collection*

Despite the state of the change rooms and toilets the Eltham pool was a popular place. On those hot days the pool would be filled with other bodies, young and old, seeking solace from the heat, too crowded really to take a dive from the board. But you could jump in from the side, make a big splash, sink, surface the water, heave yourself out and do it all again. And again. The pool closed at 5PM sharp. The walk home was always longer and slower than the walk to the pool. Would have been wonderful if Mum had a car to pick us up or if a bus service were available.



Eltham Swimming Pool
Postcard - Valentine Series
No. 3198
Photograph - EDHS collection

These children are in the yard of the Local History Centre, awaiting a tour of the Justice Precinct (which includes the Police Residence, the replica Police Station, the Courthouse and the Police Lock-up). But this article isn't about the children or their tour. It's about what they're sitting on.

Bluestone (in Victoria) is basalt, spewed up by volcanic activity, some of it millions of years ago, though some only 10,000 years ago. Basalt country is generally west of Melbourne but extends to the east roughly as far as the Plenty River.

There were basalt quarries in several spots around Melbourne, including Clifton Hill and Alphington. Many inner suburban laneways were (and still are) paved with bluestone pitchers.

Despite its ready availability, though, bluestone was not especially fashionable as a building material. In central Melbourne, it was mainly used for foundations and for relatively insignificant buildings such as warehouses. An exception was the impressive bluestone St Patrick's Cathedral. However, the thickness of the blocks made bluestone ideal for the Old Melbourne Gaol and Pentridge Prison. And it was used for smaller "prisons" such as the original Eltham Police cell block, built in the 1860s, pretty much where the children are sitting in the foreground of the photo. That lock-up was demolished in about 1960, and it would be reasonable to assume that some of the blocks were left on site for the garden retaining wall.

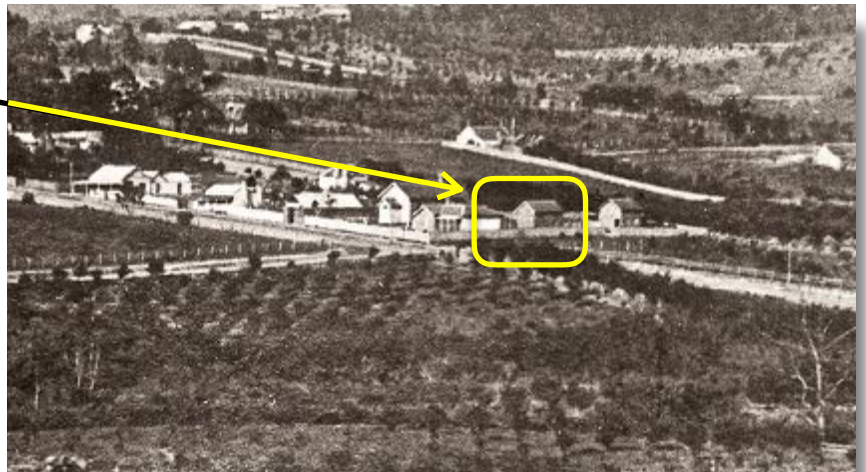
Not so! They were taken away to be recycled. Many were used as edging at the intersection of Main Road and Wattletree Road when traffic islands were established. Others may have been used alongside Mount Pleasant Road, and it is reputed that some even found their way to people's gardens. But later, in the 1980s, the bluestone edging at the Wattletree Road intersection was replaced with concrete kerbing. At that time, the Justice Precinct site (which was then occupied by Council's Parks and Environment Department) was being landscaped, and so the blocks were brought back home, as it were, for construction of the retaining wall.

The children in the photo look happy. They didn't realise they were sitting on volcanic lava.



Primary School children at the Eltham Justice Precinct - 2019
Photograph - Jim Connor

A section of an early photograph of the Eltham Justice Precinct. The bluestone cell block can be seen in the rear yard. It is located between the Police House at the front and the stables at the rear of the site.



Sunnybrook - romantic, charming

From the *Diamond Valley Local*, Thursday, March 31, 1954

On the slope of a hill on the East side of Bolton Street and overlooking willows that trail gracefully in a creeklet which shows no great haste to blend with Diamond Creek and so to the Yarra, there stands a great old-fashioned home. Outwardly it speaks of past opulence rather than beauty of design, but the velvet green lawns and the formal neatly weeded rose gardens, the well established trees, tennis courts, wisteria covered pergolas and the great curved fronds of old palms produce an atmosphere that cannot be built-up in less than decades. Here is irresistible old-world charm. The jangle of today cannot penetrate . . . it is a place to remember . . . a place where events to be remembered have a perfect setting . . . it is "Sunnybrook."

From the neighbouring 'Beranto Lodge' Mrs. Lenne can catch glimpses of 'Sunnybrook,' but the old home is well hidden from all quarters and only the faultlessly kept lawn can be seen by the curious. Like many other people, Mrs. Lenne was curious. Who can blame her.

'Sunnybrook' is a name to conjure with in Eltham. When the elderly men of the township were young bucks 'Sunnybrook' stood alone, a proud home that was known and established.

Amongst the simple homes of the valley of the Diamond Creek, 'Sunnybrook' was Queen.

In the roistering days of the Diamond Valley, when Kangaroo Ground was the seat of the Shire and when five pubs dotted the road from Lower Plenty to the civic centre, 'Sunnybrook' was off the track of the boisterous and tipsy.

'Sunnybrook' is still off the beaten track . . . but only slightly so; it no longer looks over cow pastures, but the neat, newly built houses which dot the length of the Main Road. They are still no closer than half a mile and while these houses have sprung up the fine trees and shrubs have quietly closed in around the boundaries of 'Sunnybrook' as if to keep the old place to itself.

That is how it has become something to whet the curiosity. When the course of events put the place on the market Mrs. Lenne bought it.

When a modern house is bought it is pliable in the sense that the owner moulds it according to personality. It can remain severe, utilitarian and with a little neglect soon run to an ugly shabbiness.

But with old 'Sunnybrook' it is different. There is in existence a character indelibly written into every line of the place . . . it is a LOVE OF ENGLAND.

Upon 'Sunnybrook' has been lavished the devoted love of England to such a degree that it must be seen. The gardens and lawns are formal, and though lovely and speaking of the leisure of past years they are not English . . . they are just lovely, with the beauty that only the long established seem to possess.

It is inside 'Sunnybrook' that the intense love of England is seen.

Years ago the home was bought by a Mr. Martin, who was getting on in years, as a home for his much younger wife. The couple spent thousands of pounds as well as endless care and imagination in the complete redecorating of their home.

Oak panelling imported from England was built in. Huge fireplaces shed their Colonial appearance to become the fireplaces of England . . . and they were so in every sense because they were also imported from England.

One lovely specimen whose gracious lines are remarked upon by all who see it, is a certified antique of finest English Oak.

Sunnybrook - romantic, charming.

(continued from page 6)

Care was taken to see that hand made wrought iron light fittings were in keeping.

The old place has three lounge, dining or living rooms according to taste and requirements, and all are bigger than the biggest attempted in a “big” modern home. This does not include an outside living space of ample proportions, all fine flywired in and enclosing a fernery. A turn of a tap and spray as fine as mist is released over the rockery. On a scorching summer day when no relief short of a swim could help ordinary people, the resident of ‘Sunnybrook’ found the coolness of a dell in which to sit and enjoy their evening meal. What is more, the temperature of the whole house could be reduced by merely turning on this extensive spray water system. Yes, comfort to luxury standard is built in.



Photograph taken (c1874) looking east across Bolton Street - ‘Sunnybrook’ is possibly shown in the front left corner
Photograph - EDHS collection*

And what happens to 'Sunnybrook' now?

Mrs Lenne is famous to thousands for her quite fabulous catering. Her home and her "Wanda Inn" at Hepburn Springs have long been a Mecca for those who want the different in catering . . . different in the sense that every client is treated as a friend, not a customer and the hospitality and attention one would give to an honoured friend is accorded. And the food! – ask anyone who has enjoyed the privilege. Ask those who attended the reception given to Mr. Menzies by Eltham Shire Council; ask those members of the Diamond Valley Chamber of Commerce who enjoyed it!

There is only one word anyone ever uses . . . “unbelievable!” it must be seen and eaten to be believed.

And ‘Sunnybrook’ will ring to the laughter, and offer its spaciousness for the fun of all who join in the happiest occasion in the life of those just married, whose wedding reception is intended to be “remembered.”

Mrs. Lenne is a dynamic ball of energy whose enthusiasm is not to be brooked.

She has acquired the home of her dreams.

This follows the earlier part of Frank's story in our August newsletter.

How many bins we carried each time often depended on the socio-economic area - you truly could write a book about a garbage round. In the older, more established areas, around stations and main roads - Montmorency, central Eltham and Briar Hill for example - the typical collection was a single tin bin with a lid, and it was a quarter to half filled with burnt cans and sometimes briquette (compressed brown coal bricks) ash carefully wrapped in newspaper. Nothing else. Combustion stoves and compost heaps - nothing was wasted. They grew up in The Depression.

Around the newer areas, often just the next road, it was a vastly different story. Two bins were usual, often newer and made of plastic, although steel bins were still very common as they were more robust, however three, four and even five bins were not uncommon. Milk was just starting to be sold in cartons - more single-use refuse - and the milkman, with his bottles and horse and cart clip-clopping along doing his daily round, his days were ending. The houses were bigger, households more affluent and food packaging was gathering pace. They did not have compost heaps and wood and briquette stoves and heaters, so everything went into the bin. I had a chat about my observations to a friend's parents who regularly put out four or five bins, and within two weeks after creating a compost bin and sorting their rubbish, they had reduced to one bin.

On quiet, residential streets - the vast majority - a runner would run each side of the truck and we would pick up both sides of the street. This meant that as the truck would slowly travel down the street, the runner would run to the bins, knock off the lids, pick up the bins, run to the truck, jump up, empty the bins, run back to the property, put the bins down - usually upside down next to the lids - run to the next house and repeat. Also pick up bottles if there were any there and put them directly into the bags on the back. Everyone would be on high alert for traffic, particularly if you were running the right-hand side of the truck. Billy, the driver, was right onto it if you had bottles or were delayed for any reason. He had eyes in the back of his head. Busy, main roads we would load one side only with both runners on the left-hand side. This meant that although the truck travelled approximately 32 kms on our run, the runners would run at least half of that again. If we had to cross a main road or travel further than say 30kms, we would just stand on the running board and hang on. Talk about a combined cardio/weight training! As I said, I loved it.

When the front compartment became full, periodically the driver would activate a hydraulic ram at the front, compressing the collected rubbish to make more space and then we continued on until it was full. We typically would empty the truck three times during the round. Emptying meant removing the bags of bottles, unlocking the rear door, then pushing the garbage out the back. We would usually snatch a ten or fifteen minute maximum break for smoko somewhere in between. The tip site at that time was the large block of land on the north-east corner of Bridge and Susan streets bordered by the Diamond Creek and railway line. The entrance was where the skateboard park is now. It was just about full and the Shire was beginning to transfer tipping operations to the old sand quarry at the end of Graham Road in Kangaroo Ground.

We dressed pretty much the same. Shorts, footy shorts or cut-off jeans - I always wore cut-off jeans with leather belt. Also, a shirt - short sleeved or cut-off, open-front, drill or checked. No shirt if it was hot. Strong leather gloves. No hat (I had plenty of hair then) and solid leather work boots, like Jenkins or Blundstones. We were all very, very brown with contrasting white hands and wrists and white feet and ankles. If you got sunburn you just put your shirt on - the sun didn't have the sting it has today.

See more of Frank's story at: www.elthamhistory.org.au

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

Richard George Kaylock

In his early adult life, Richard Kaylock worked as a whaler (visiting California and New Zealand) and later as a drover on a large cattle station in New South Wales. In 1848 he came to Melbourne, working as a slaughterman, then settled in Eltham in 1854, his occupation thereafter being recorded as butcher or orchardist. He also had some experiences at Ballarat during the Eureka Rebellion. He died in 1910 at the age of 84. His obituary described him as a "striking personality" who was "brusque to a fault" and "strictly upright, expecting others to be the same". It seems from his will that he was illiterate. He is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Emily.

His property was in Wellington Street (now Brougham Street) and apparently extended across the Diamond Creek. The land on the western side of the creek was farmed, the house being on the eastern side. For many years the Brougham Street bridge was generally known as "Kaylock's Bridge". It formed part of the original coach road to Eltham and in 1922 was described as an "old rustic bridge". Its low level and insubstantial construction made it susceptible to flood damage, necessitating frequent closures until repairs could be carried out. The original bridge was demolished in 1923 and replaced by a "new up-to-date" one. When a lack of finances delayed repairs to the Bridge Street bridge in 1931, traffic had to detour via Brougham Street for some time. Local residents feared that the Bridge Street bridge might never reopen.



Kaylock's Bridge
Photograph - EDHS collection*

Main sources: Obituary in Evelyn Observer 13/5/1910, various newspaper articles 1922-1931

George Knapman

George ("Snowy") Knapman was a blacksmith by trade. Between roughly 1885 and 1910, he operated a "shoeing forge" and wheelwright workshop in Main Road Eltham, next door to the Eltham Court House. The location was well chosen. Mail coaches from Melbourne passed through Eltham en route to Christmas Hills and Yarra Glen, with another heading to Kingstown (now Panton Hill). It was common practice for horses to be changed at Eltham.

In 1902 George was treasurer of the Eltham Rifle Club and his children attended Eltham Primary School, where he was on the school's Board of Advice. In 1907 he was president of the Eltham Progressive League, calling for public toilets at a local picnic spot. George's brother William was a blacksmith at Heidelberg and after he died in 1909 George moved there to continue the business established by their father. George died suddenly in 1923 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Mary.

A photo taken in about 1901, captioned "Election Day Eltham", shows a large crowd of men outside Knapman's premises, waiting to vote at the Court House. There are no women there; they were not empowered to vote until 1902.

Main sources: various newspaper articles 1885-1923



Election Day Eltham
Photograph - Reynolds/Prior collection

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We appreciate the support we receive from Nillumbik Shire Council

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

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