Eltham District Historical Society

Newsletter



No. 255 December 2020

Well....things have been somewhat different

Jim Connor

As we look back on 2020 we realise this year has been somewhat different. The COVID-19 pandemic has spread across the world and has impacted on all aspects of our life, including our Eltham District Historical Society.

While we have unfortunately been restricted from holding meetings or excursions, or accessing our Local History Centre, some members have been continuing to work behind the scenes from home to maintain EDHS operations, including ongoing administrative requirements, responding to enquiries and undertaking some scanning and cataloguing of photographs and records.

In keeping with things being somewhat different this year we have included in this our last newsletter for 2020 items from a variety of contributors, as we wanted to record, as part of our own local history, some personal reflections on experiences during the COVID isolation.

For many baby boomers and beyond 2020 may be the most significant, defining time of change in their lifetime. In historical terms it will be notable period to remember and hopefully be able to reflect on.

As we were restricted from holding our Annual General Meeting in April we deferred this and held a somewhat different open air meeting on Saturday 28th November, in the rear yard of our Local History Centre at 728 Main Road, Eltham.

At this meeting the following office bearers and committee members were elected for 2020-2021:

PresidentJim ConnorSenior Vice-PresidentPeter PidgeonJunior Vice-PresidentLiz PidgeonTreasurer / Membership SecretaryRobert MarshallSociety SecretaryRussell YeomanCommittee Members - Irene Kearsey, Tony Brocksopp, Joan Castledine,
Alison Delaney, Richard Pinn, Julia Drew

We thank all committee members, including Lesley Mitchell and Wendy Wilson, for their time spent on our committee and their valued contributions to the operation of the Eltham District Historical Society and welcome Robert Marshall and Julia Drew as new committee members.

We hope you can enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time over Christmas and have a healthy and successful COVID free year in 2021

We will not hold a Christmas function this year and look forward to our first meeting in 2021

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More Thoughts About COVID Experiences

Following the story in our last newsletter about Russell and Marion Yeoman's adventures around Eltham, since the earliest of the COVID 19 pandemic restrictions, we thought it would be historically important to record different experiences of other people locally during this time.

Wendy Wilson

March and April 2020 have been a period of adjustment to the Corona virus and socially distancing ourselves to remain healthy.

The seriousness of the virus impacted upon us when our niece, Kitty, was leaving New York to escape it after living there for about 4 years. She stayed with us in isolation as we have a studio area which is removed from our home building as her parents live in a small house in the inner city, so there would have been a risk in living in close proximity. We enjoyed being able to leave her evening meals on her doorstep and texting her to let her know. It amazed me that modern technology enabled journalists from the UK to interview her at hourly intervals in the evening about her new film 'The Assistant', which had just been launched there. I was wondering how people in the UK could watch it with theatres closed but it is available online there and USA and will be in Australia within a few months.

During my daily walk I discovered to my surprise a 'take away coffee' van in a driveway in Hartland Way providing fresh coffee. The same day as I walked past Eltham East Primary School a kangaroo was bouncing along the footpath towards me. As the school fence was on my left I was about to stand next to a tree on my right, but it swerved slightly and bounded off down the road.

On the corner of Bible and Grove streets the house owners had placed a bench seat under a broad green tree. There was a sign next to it saying 'Rest and be thankful'. A week later there was a dish of small Easter eggs with a sign saying 'For you from the Easter bunny', with soft toys sitting on the bench. To entertain young children on their walks many residents placed bears or other soft toys in windows peeking out, on letterboxes or in trees to bring a smile to those passing.

We were looking forward to catching up with our four grandsons coming from Brisbane at Easter, but due to the planes being grounded and then the Queensland borders being closed they were unable to come for their annual camping trip at Howqua. On Good Friday we received a surprise with a knock at the door. Our daughter, Anna and only granddaughter, Olive, were at the door with homemade hot cross buns and (Easter) bunny biscuits. They stayed outside and kept 1.5 metres apart. We were delighted to see them and caught up with our other grandsons by phone.



A neighbourhood bench seat Photograph by Wendy Wilson



An Easter surprise Photograph by Wendy Wilson

Early on Anzac Day morning we followed the suggestion of the RSL

and walked to the bottom of our drive with Michael wearing his father's World War 2 medals. There were a few people along Arthur Street - a neighbour, Tim, about 6 doors away had a speaker playing the service from the War Memorial in Canberra. The next day I thanked him and he said he had prepared bacon and egg rolls available for the neighbours after the Dawn service.

More Thoughts About COVID Experiences

Just after the Last Post the sound of a train leaving Eltham and trundling over the Trestle Bridge was heard clearly through the still air to the top of Arthur Street. It was all very moving. Tim had also been aware of the sound of the train on the Trestle bridge.

Our communication with others has been largely by phone and have just started contacting the grandchildren by Skype. My book club is having our first Zoom meeting tomorrow evening. We have watched two friend's separate funeral services by a link to the church and it was still an emotional experience. The deaths were not connected to the virus.

With the aid of a mask I shop locally. Our son Aaron kindly collected food for us at the start but I felt comfortable about continuing with careful planning. We have a big old mud brick house and garden, which keeps us busy. There are still many tasks to complete, which gives us a sense of satisfaction and gratefulness for our health.

Kitty Green

After a week of confusion, I finally decided it was best to come back to Melbourne as New York City's coronavirus cases were dramatically increasing each day. I was developing my next film project which is work that can be done remotely and so could be easily continued in Melbourne. It wasn't difficult to find a flight. I booked a ticket for the weekend, the 21st of March 2020, and packed up my apartment in Manhattan so that my belongings could be safely moved out by a moving company if I couldn't get back before my lease was up. John F. Kennedy airport was almost empty. It was eerily quiet. There was no line to check in. There were maybe five people in the security line. I heard them chatting and it turns out they were all Qantas flight attendants who were being flown home as the flight they were supposed to work had been cancelled. The shops were all closed at JFK. I could only purchase a drink and snacks from the news-stand.

I was worried the flight would be cancelled but we boarded on time. I wiped down my armrests and tray table with antibacterial wipes and I wore my mask the entire time. Only half of the people on the plane were wearing masks. I was careful to wash my hands as often as possible. The stopover in Los Angeles was uneventful but I did see a family board the plane wearing full hazmat suits with plastic face shields. I arrived at Melbourne airport feeling well but a little jet-lagged.

My dad was waiting in his mask. We drove to Eltham with the window open a touch to keep the air fresh. It was difficult to hear each other. Aunty Wendy and Uncle Michael had prepared the little apartment below their house for me with plenty of food and fresh flowers. It was self-contained so made it easy to abide by the



On the flight to Melbourne Photograph by Kitty Green

quarantine rules. I was lucky I arrived that weekend as a few days later they made arrivals isolate in hotels. My hands were a little dry and sore from all the hand sanitiser, but it was great to be able to safely touch things again. I had a lovely two weeks in isolation working on my next project in the Wilson's apartment and doing jigsaw puzzles and watching the native birds in the garden when I needed to take a break. We could communicate through the air vent and the floorboards and Wendy and Mike would wave to me from the garden. I was relieved to be safe at home with my family and far from the epicentre.

Kitty Green is a filmmaker who lives and works in New York City

More Thoughts About COVID Experiences

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Rose Dumaresq

At the start of coronavirus I did not believe we would ever go into home learning. I decided to do lots of drawings of faces and at the start I could only draw men's faces. It turned out that it was because I made the chin too broad and the mouth too big. At the start of COVID it was quite weird not being able to see my friends and having to get onto a screen every day with not as many tasks. I would often get bored once I finished my tasks but I got to go for an hour's walk with mum every second day so I guess it was not too bad.

As it got later into the term I started to forget what it is like to be in a classroom and walking home. I would definitely have preferred to be at school but it was what it was and I was stuck in front of a computer until 1 o'clock doing this online learning if you look on the bright side, I was still learning. I was finding it difficult to do all my work on the computer but I survived so it must not have been too bad. I am very lucky that I did not need to share a computer with a sibling so I could get my work done and attend meetings.

I quickly got better at online learning and found ways to make it way easier to turn in. My favourite subject is writing and I was really enjoying doing all the tasks. During the school holidays I got to go to Lorne and Tootgarook with some friends, I really enjoyed getting away from home. The police also turned up when we were at Tootgarook to make sure we were leaving by Monday as they had just called the second lock down. The next term we started at school but quickly went back into home learning, the only difference between the two stages of home learning was that in the second one we did more video calls, like for our sport, Japanese, art and music classes we attended a video call. I got really good at figuring stuff out like one day I could not get an emoji and the next I could get seven up in 1 minute - here are some I sent to my teacher in my journal.



Towards the end of home learning I had no idea what to feel, happy, sad, curious or annoyed. One thing I really miss is a festival we go to called the Lost Lands. We camp there along with many other families. I also miss seeing grandma because she lives in Ballarat. I have also missed out on acting lessons and swimming lessons, which I hope we can get back to soon.

Source: Written by Rose Dumaresq who is 8 years old. This is the first time any of her writings have been published.

Some short comments about COVID experiences

Anxiety, Adaptation, Amelioration, Anticipation, Alive !!! Cognac Ouzo Vodka Ice Daiquiri - Joan C

In the early weeks of iso, transcribing (for EDHS) an Eltham Shire Building Permit Register – all 4,609 lines of it – helped me, strange as that may sound - *Irene K*

It evoked the 1950s slightly - Richard P

We have recorded on a map where we have walked during the lockdown - Russell Y

Eltham Pool

Since publishing Sue Bennett's story in our last newsletter about her experiences at the old Eltham Pool we have gathered together a few other views of this popular place.

Gayle Blackwood

I lived in Rosanna, I was 4 years old, my brother 2 and my Mother missed the ocean she had grown up with at Hampton. Rosanna was a long way from water and on special occasions Dad would load us into the Austin A7 and head for the Eltham Pool. Dad didn't swim and he didn't like lots of noisy children but he did love Mum so we got to play at the pool.

The scary part was driving under the Trestle Bridge. My brother and I would scream, we knew it was going to collapse and crush us. When we coincided our arrival with a train overhead death was certain in



Opening of the old Eltham Swimming Pool - 1936 Photograph from the EDHS Collection *

our minds. The pool in my memory, while wonderfully wet, was very basic and to my prissy 4 year old sensibilities, grubby. The change room smelt and the toilets stunk, much better to pee in the pool. You had to walk through a foot bath of purple fluid before entering the pool. Mum explained that it was to kill Papillomas, black spots on the soles of your feet. I kept a safe distance from anybody I thought may have spotty feet. My enduring memory is touching the bottom of the pool to find it covered in green slime. A lot of squealing ensued. We were all very happy when the modern, large, sparkly clean Ivanhoe Baths opened. Mum got her licence and would frequently drive us there for long days spent submerged in water and chlorine.

Frank Taylor

As a young teenager I recall the toilets at the Eltham Pool, man, they were primitive. Pretty much were the benchmark for my generation, I'm sure, on what was the absolute minimum standard. I can't speak for the women's however the men's dunny/change shed had roughly 4 (or 6) cubicles, no doors, (I'm not sure even if they were partitioned) and a pan service. Naturally they reeked (I'm being kind here) and were used only in a crisis. I'm pretty sure that it was up to the pool attendant(s) to change them out as required. Plainly, with the constant smells and overflows, this wasn't a cherished task.

Against one wall was the urinal. This wall was lined in sheet galvanised iron. About one and a half to two feet up thereabouts, and running at an incline, was a standard, "quad" house gutter, the lower end passing out of the building through a rough hole hacked out of the adjoining wall and disappearing to who-knows-where. No-one was looking to find out. The sheet iron above the gutter ended (and shed the urine) into this gutter. Around the remaining walls were timber slatted benches, fully wooden framed. NO privacy whatsoever. A stand out childhood memory.

Ann Constable

The water in these pools was changed every Monday, so by Sunday they were fairly unsanitary! Chlorination was unheard of in those days. Illnesses such as impetigo (or school sores as it was known) red eye and ear infections were all blamed on the water in this swimming pool, some with justification, but it did not stop the people of Eltham swimming there. There were two pools, the large one was 25 yards long and went from 3 feet to 6 feet with a diving board at the deep end. The small one was about 10 feet long and very shallow with wide steps for the smaller children. We would walk to the pool, down Henry Street, cross the Main Road and then there was a paddock with a well-worn track that we walked along crossing over the railway lines and there we were.

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Russell Yeoman

Frank Taylor

In the 1960s I was working for Eltham Shire Council. The Shire Office was just across the railway line from the swimming pool. For some years one of my jobs was the twice daily testing of the pool water. This involved checking of chlorine and Ph levels. If they were not correct then the input of powdered chemicals would be adjusted by Doug the pool operator.

Doug was a Council outdoor worker who ran the pool in the summer months. This was a one-man operation. Doug collected the admission fees, operated the pumps and chemical input, maintained order, kept the pool and change rooms clean and presumably acted as lifeguard also.

Originally the main pool was chlorinated but the small wading pool was not so I was asked to design a system to recirculate treated water to that pool, a job more suited to a plumber than someone used to designing roads and drains. However it was installed by a plumber and achieved the desired outcome.

The shortest way to the pool was through a hole in the railway fence at the rear of the shire office. Occupational health and safety requirements (if they existed then) were not as rigorously enforced as they are today. From time to time the hole would be repaired necessitating a detour under the trestle bridge. However the hole would soon reappear as this was the shortest way to the pool from the shops and station.

After surviving my teenage years, including various experiences at the Eltham Pool I became a Council worker for a little while. It was September. The Council pool had been emptied (I'm not sure if this was done every year) for maintenance and a re-paint. Myself and another were detailed for two days to go and re-paint the inside of the pool in that classic marine-pool blue. The technique employed was to empty a 4 gallon (20 litre) tin of paint directly onto the bottom - starting at the shallow end - and using a broom, spread it as evenly up the walls and floor as best we could. I don't know when paint rollers came into general use, but it wasn't by 1973.



Construction of the old Eltham Swimming Pool - 1936 Photograph from the EDHS Collection *

Thankfully we didn't do the change sheds/toilets. I don't remember how much paint we used, it must have been a considerable amount. I remember it vividly as it was a warm couple of days and it was the first time that I got sunburnt all over any unprotected skin as it was like working in a light box. It didn't matter where you stood, sunlight would reflect from any angle - including behind my ears and under my nose and chin.

Vale - Max Dimmack 1922 - 2020

Max Dimmack was a modern Australian landscape painter, former wartime soldier, art teacher, author and lecturer, who lived in Lower Plenty. He lectured in several Victorian colleges, including Burwood Teachers College and at Coburg State Teachers College, where he was Head of Visual Arts. Max was known for his vigorous advocacy of an extension of art education. He also wrote a book on the history of the Eltham RSL. He died on Tuesday 29th September 2020.

It Has Been Some Coincidence

Neil Webster completed his Secondary education at Leongatha High School in 1960 and in 1961 commenced a Science course at Melbourne University. Although he had no specific career in mind it was suggested an Industrial Chemist was a good option.

During the course of the first year of University he was part of an excursion to the CSIRO Laboratory. The thought of being confined in a laboratory all day did not appeal to him and during February 1962 he started perusing the classified advertisements for other employment ideas. An advertisement for a trainee Land Surveyor caught his attention and although he knew nothing about surveying or the courses involved he attended two job interviews and was offered a place with each company. He chose a position at a small office in Lonsdale Street, although this company did have a large main office in Mornington. Neil commenced working in the surveying profession in March 1962 and attended night school at RMIT four nights a week.

After working with this company for several months, the surveyor he was working with asked if he had any relation involved in surveying, to which he answered, "No, not to my knowledge". The surveyor referred to was Cape Webster and this caught his attention as, by coincidence, his father's second name was Cape. Neil's father did then inform him that, "Yes, your Great Grandfather Cape Webster was a surveyor and his old theodolite is still at the farm in Middle Tarwin." Obviously if that advertisement in the classifieds had not come to Neil's attention he would never have established this family link to surveying.

During the next forty or so years Neil had very little inkling of Cape Webster's involvement in surveying and it was only when an Eltham neighbour, Michael Aitken, asked him to investigate the earlier ownership of land from which their Eltham street derived that Neil, mentioned off the cuff, that his Great Grandfather was a Land Surveyor. Michael shortly after informed Neil that Cape Webster had surveyed in the Nillumbik area, having apparently obtained this information from internet



Cape Webster 1832 - 1910 Supplied by Neil Webster

searches. This aroused Neil's interest and he has now sourced survey plans prepared by Cape Webster which involved the surveying of Smiths (spelt Smyths) Gully Township, a substantial part of Diamond Creek Township and also a large portion of the original Eltham town lots (circa 1858).

If we step a little further back we find Cape Webster was an indentured engineering and surveying apprentice for 5 years in England to James Newland, the Borough Engineer of Liverpool, who designed for Liverpool the first purpose built sewerage system established anywhere in Britain. In response to the unsanitary state of this city Newland also developed and promoted an ambitious plan to strategically support sustainable urban living, encompassing roads, parks, street lighting and importantly municipal baths and wash houses. This was the environment Cape was trained in before he left Liverpool in April 1853 to travel to Melbourne, arriving later that year.

Here he commenced surveying work at the Surveyor General's office and was undertaking projects in the Ballarat area by 1855. Neil's further research helped ascertain his Great Grandfather's extensive surveying activities. There are original survey plans bearing his name as Assistant Surveyor for townships, or part thereof, of places such as Beaufort, Avoca, Linton, as well as large sections around Mount Emu, Chepstowe, Pentland Hills and South Gippsland.

It Has Been Some Coincidence

In 1880 the new Royal Exhibition Building, designed by Joseph Reed, of Reed and Barnes architects, opened to stage the extraordinary Melbourne International Exhibition to showcase Australia's produce and products to the world, as well as exhibit an extensive range of such goods from various countries. Melbourne had never seen anything like this extravaganza since the settlement was established. So what has this to do with the story of Cape Webster, you may well ask. If you look closely at the detailed plan showing the internal layout of the Exhibition Building for this internationally recognised exhibition you will note this was drawn by Cape Webster. He was awarded a Bronze Medal for his involvement.

Returning closer to home, Neil's first contact with the Eltham area was in early 1965 when he was in charge of a survey party doing the set-out for John Sist Contractor as part of the construction of Bible Street, Arthur Street, Brownes Crescent and Henry Street. It really surprised him how Arthur Street and Henry Street came to a dead end at the eastern end adjacent to bushland.

Neil changed employment in 1967 to work for a small company in Essendon and in 1968 completed his studies and became a Licensed Surveyor.

In late 1968 and early 1969 he was involved in several surveys in Eltham including a survey of the land occupied by the Catholic Ladies College, so as to bring the land under the Transfer of Land Act and also a subdivision adjoining the southern boundary of Montsalvat and another one on the eastern side of Hillcrest Avenue, at the corner of Lavender Park Road. This road was shown at the time as New Street.

In 1979 Neil and his wife Susan, with their young family, were living in Lower Templestowe and were looking for a quieter place to live as their street was becoming quite busy. Neil saw in the Age (Classifieds) a property for sale in Eltham South and his memory of the previous surveying in Eltham prompted his



Eltham Town Lands Survey by Cape Webster c1858 Supplied by Neil Webster - then digitally enhanced

interest. In 1980 they moved into their property in Eltham and have been there ever since.

Although it had never been his intention to start his own survey company, it just happened and for the last 40 years as well as living in Eltham he has also based his survey practice here, now operated by his son Evan, who continues the family tradition.

It has been some coincidence that for the past 40 years, unbeknown to him, Neil has been driving home along roads such as Metery Road, Lavender Park Road and Hillcrest Avenue, which were first surveyed by his Great Grandfather in 1858.

Main sources - Writings by and discussions with Neil Webster

Eltham District Historical Society

Eltham Cemetery Stories

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

Alistair Samuel Knox

Alistair Knox was an environmental based designer and builder who came to Eltham in 1948. Influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin, he sought to create buildings that would blend into the landscape, enhanced by the planting of indigenous flora. The post-war shortage of building materials made traditional construction expensive. Adobe (mud-brick) provided a cheap and plentiful alternative, and one which would be aesthetically pleasing.

Mud-brick manufacture was a problem at first. Sonia Skipper had been experimenting with Eltham clays for years to find the best mix for making bricks and render. Alistair employed her as building foreman on several of his sites. By the 1980s, he had brought mud-brick and earth building into the Australian mainstream, and a

Knox-designed house had become highly desirable. Sonia said that he would craft a bespoke earthen house to fit with his client's lifestyle.

He was drawn to the environmental movement, publishing three books on housing and the environment, and speaking on radio. He died in 1986 and is buried in a small garden setting at Eltham Cemetery.

Main sources: Article by Fay Woodhouse in Australian Dictionary of Biography (reproduced at alistairknox.org), "Laughing Waters Road" by Jane Woollard.

William Morris

The Evelyn Hotel was situated in Main Road Eltham, immediately opposite its competitor the Eltham Hotel. It had opened as the Fountain of Friendship Hotel by 1854, when it was described as having "twelve spacious apartments all canvassed and papered," but had changed its name by 1878. The proprietor from about 1889 until 1919 was William Morris; he was also the licensee for most of that time. (The William Morris who was a butcher at Eltham in the early 1900s was

Evelyn Hotel Photograph - EDHS collection*

no relation.) It advertised that it had "good stables," located behind the hotel in Pitt Street, a necessity for hotels at the time. Mail coaches en route from Heidelberg to Queenstown (now St Andrews), Panton Hill and Kangaroo Ground changed horses there. It was de-licensed as a hotel in 1919 but continued to operate as a boarding house until it was destroyed by fire in 1931.

William was born in Eltham in 1848 or 1849. He was married three times; his second wife had the same surname as his first so they may have been sisters. He was described as "jolly and hearty" and ran a publican's booth at the Eltham Races in 1903, reportedly doing a good trade. He was an Eltham Shire Councillor between 1897 and 1918 and was Shire President for a time.

He died in 1922 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with several other family members. Main source: Private research by Harry Gilham.

Eltham District Historical Society



Alistair Samuel Knox Photograph - EDHS collection*



In these challenging times for local businesses it is even more important to support our local sponsors - they support our Society



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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

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)





Our Eltham, Our History

The Eltham Cemetery Trust recently undertook maintenance and improvement works around the Lake. The works were undertaken by renowned local landscape architect Robert Boyle and the team from Robert Boyle Landscape Design, who also completed the original lake development in 1993.

The works undertaken included:

- Necessary maintenance, including draining and cleaning out the lake, the installation of a new liner and drainage works to capture excess water (underground & overground) for irrigation
- Creating new pathways and access for families, including a new timber and steel footbridge across the lake together with a timber arbour at the base of the lake providing shelter and shade
- Positioning of new rock work to provide families with interment and memorials around the lake
- Landscaping and planting complimentary of existing Cemetery grounds

The Trust has also recently installed a new yet to be named wood carved sculpture by local artist Leigh Conkie, featuring two local Black Southern Yellow Tail Cockatoos. The sculpture has been installed at the southern end of the cemetery, near Wisteria Walk and Lavender Park Lawn. Landscaping surround the sculpture will occur over the coming months.

The Eltham Cemetery Trust is a community space, designed to provide a tranquil and serene resting place complementary of the natural settings. All persons are welcome to visit and experience the cemetery, to appreciate local history, open landscaped spaces and artistic installations; the cemetery's primary purpose as a final resting place should always be respected.

Julia Drew - Eltham Cemetery Trust

ELTHAM CEMETERY





Our Eltham, Our History For further information contact Rita: The Secretary, P.O. Box 423, Eltham VIC 3095 Ph: (03) 9432 1963 Email: admin@elthamcemetery.com