

Newsletter

No. 256 February 2021



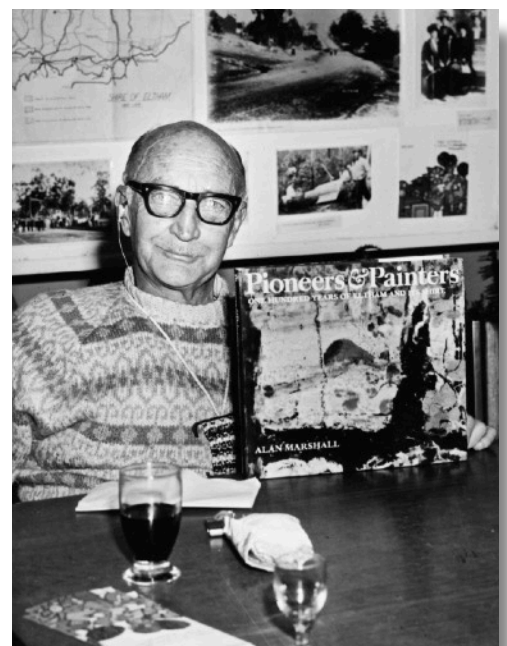
A Very Special Year

Jim Connor

Our actions and experiences during 2020 will become part of our own personal and local history. As we reflect on the history of our own district we acknowledge that 2021 is a very special year. On 6th April 1871, being 150 years ago, the Shire of Eltham was formally declared and became well known as a municipality in which lived a large number of painters, sculptors, potters, writers and many other creative people.

One of the resident writers was Alan Marshall, the internationally acclaimed author, who worked with others to write the book *Pioneers & Painters* to document one hundred years of Eltham and its Shire. Launched fifty years ago in 1971, to commemorate the centenary of the Shire of Eltham, this tells the story of the people who were involved in the history of the district since the days of its discovery by Europeans.

In this book Eltham Shire Councillor Charis Pelling, who was also president of the then Shire of Eltham Historical Society, noted: 'If we have painted a picture of an active community aware of the complexities of life, yet close enough to living things to maintain a cheerful and balanced existence, then we have achieved our aim of writing a tribute to, as well as a record of, the courage and enterprise and the creative endeavours of the people of Eltham Shire'.



Alan Marshall at the launch
of *Pioneers & Painters* - 1971
Photograph EDHS Collection*

A Very Different Year

Due to some ongoing uncertainty about future COVID restrictions the EDHS executive has, in the best interests of our members, decided to reduce and reframe our activities for the next six months. In the 2021 program distributed with this newsletter we have intentionally not included any meetings in enclosed spaces, until our proposed Annual General Meeting on Saturday 12th June at 2.00pm. We trust our members will understand the rationale behind these decisions.

Included in this program are two Heritage Walks and a Heritage Excursion, which will enable us to share time together in the open. We hope you are able to attend these events. Our first one is:

Heritage Walk - Woodridge Wander - 2.00pm Saturday 6th March 2021

see further details on page 2

The Woodridge Estate was a major residential subdivision that was developed in many stages in the 1970s and 80s. It extended easterly from the older residential area of Eltham into what had previously been largely privately owned bushland. The subdivision design took into account the steep topography and resulted in large blocks that enabled preservation of much of the tree cover. It included a number of small parks and walkways and the one kilometre long Woodridge Linear Park. A bushland area left as a proposed school site later became the Pauline Toner Butterfly Reserve for preservation of the rare Eltham Copper Butterfly.

For this walk we will explore some Woodridge streets as well as the linear park and butterfly reserve. It will be a hilly walk of about 3 km and include some moderately rough tracks. We have permission to visit private property to view heritage listed houses not visible from the street. This walk on Saturday 6th March will start at 2pm at the access to Woodridge Linear Park in Grove Street just east of the Eltham East Primary School (Melway ref 22 B4). It will take about 2 hours. 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.

At the time of writing COVID restrictions do not require the wearing of masks in the open. However, masks should be carried and any changed restrictions must be complied with.

My School Excursion

Rose Dumaresq

When I was in Year Two at Eltham East my year level went on an excursion to the Eltham justice precinct. It was hosted by the people from the historical society. I had been looking forward to it so much. Lucky for us it was a warm day so we were able to walk there. When we got there we were split up into groups. The group I was in went to the courtroom first, which our guide Jim told us was built in 1860 and stopped being used in 1984. We had a pretend trial where our teacher, Miss Lapadula was caught stealing a horse and we had to decide whether she was guilty or not.

After we left the courtroom we went to the police house. To me it was very small as it only consisted of four rooms. Although it seemed small to me it turned out that it was an average sized house for it's time. It turned out that it was built in 1859. We also visited the police office which was just beside it and we talked a bit about the history of the room and the police.

After seeing the house we all got to have lunch. I was starving. I must admit that when I opened my bag to see what mum had packed for my lunch I wasn't very hungry anymore. She had packed lots of berries which I love but they were all mushed and they were sloppy. At least mum had made me lunch.

We also went to the lock up which was very small. I think that it could have passed as a box for something super big if it was made of cardboard. We locked up our teacher and then got a turn of all being locked up in there together. To my surprise it turned out that more than one person would often get locked up in the cell at a time. Later on we went to the stables to see where the horses were kept. The hay to feed them was kept on the top level and the horses were kept on the bottom. Because the building is so old we couldn't go into it. I enjoyed the day we spent at the justice precinct. I would still like to know when the stables were built and when they stopped being used. It was cool to learn about how the police stations used to work and how they work now.



Excursion photographs from the Eltham East Primary School Facebook page

In our continuing effort to collect and preserve local experiences of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic year we record the following:

In April, restaurants were finding ways to bring special dining experiences home. Mercer's in Eltham delivered meals to diners but with instructions to heat, prepare and plate up the dishes, following video tutorials posted on Facebook.

Following the first lockdown, students at Catholic Ladies' College Eltham were asking for reduced workloads, more flexible class times and shorter school days and a greater say in their education. When they returned to school in June, the school adjusted bell times, workload and modified assessment schedules, benefits learned while students attended their classes from home.

A Facebook page *Help 3095 and Surround* was set up to create “hero packages” for essential workers. This evolved to other packages organised and delivered to nominated deserving recipients. Members then resolved to create personalised care packages for every Year 12 student in the 3095 postcode, which included a handwritten letter of encouragement. They also organised teacher care packs and morning teas for school staff, Christmas packs for foster children and more.

Eltham resident and artist Joan Denison began painting brightly coloured chickens on old fence palings and giving them away to cheer up people. The art works can be seen all over Eltham front gardens as she eventually produced over 350 paintings.

The pandemic did not stop “business as usual” for many organisations though: The National Library of Australia released a new version of Trove. Community consultation took place for the Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park Master Plan. Local government council elections took place in October. The 75th anniversary of the end of WW2 was recognised. The WWII at Home: Response, Reflection and Rejuvenation website was launched by the National Trust, which featured the Eltham War Memorial precinct. Leader Newspapers suspended printing hard copies with local news now behind a pay wall.

Nillumbik Shire Council sponsored an arts project where residents wrote about their pandemic experiences, with selected text stencilled on local path surfaces. It resulted in the publication of an anthology ‘These Tiny threads remind: the written in the time of COVID-19 anthology’. Council’s Community Partnership team developed an effective online network to help maintain and expand connections with representatives of various community groups across the Shire.

The Digital Nillumbik Heritage Guide was launched by the Nillumbik Shire Council. A number of organisations, individuals and local history groups collaborated and contributed to this updated local history resource. It includes links to a virtual tour of Montsalvat, which was developed as a result of the pandemic.

Yarra Plenty Regional Library established a click and collect service at the Hurstbridge Hub and among other things staff rang every library member aged over 70 years.

Nillumbik U3A Drawing & Painting Group received a grant to enable them to share members’ work and to promote home-based ‘artstart’ learning. The PANArt Project (Pandemic Art) created a 60-page booklet that features over 100 full colour plates of art work and stories of the artists COVID journey.

On October 28, 5 million Melbourne residents came out of 111 days of coronavirus pandemic lockdown – one of the world’s longest with restrictions remaining.

If you have a coronavirus pandemic / lockdown story to share, please contact us.



The Luckman site at the Eltham Cemetery Victoria
Photograph from the Eltham Cemetery Trust

Traditions provide a sense of comfort and of belonging to enable us to connect and reconnect with each other. They shape our character and reinforce the values, morals, beliefs and passions, both individually and as part of families, friendship circles and community groups. Traditions assist us with keeping memories of the past alive and help us share them with newer generations.

Picnic and group gatherings and celebrations are the established Christmas tradition amongst visitors to the Eltham Cemetery. As the weather warms and the days become longer, visitations to the cemetery shift towards evening. We see the familiar faces returning to observe their traditions; the new traditions being formed by families who have a more recently established relationship with the cemetery. It has also extended to community members who don't have a loved one to visit, but who appreciate the natural space and its ambience.

- A group of men visit the cemetery each Christmas arriving by limousine and dressed immaculately. Over the last 10 years I have seen them visit their friend armed with their Eskies and sharing a drink to their friend's memory.
- Every year, at the completion of the last day of work for tradies, a large group of young men convene at the memorial site of their friend and colleague. They host their break up function at the cemetery where they can be close to him.
- Since the passing of his son Adam in 1998, Des Luckman has brought a handmade house to place on his son's grave during the Christmas period. He used to visit in the evening to be close to him and to be able to see the house lit up. With Des' mobility not what it once was and the gradient of our grounds, the house remains in storage at the cemetery and is put in place by our Team Leader, Chris in early December, who also prepares the flower arrangement surrounding it. He photographs the house in the very early hours of the morning to share with Des and his family.

Cemeteries are in itself full of traditions influenced by faith, culture and spirituality. The word traditional is used to describe interment methods and memorialisation and there is a deeper layer of tradition that exists in the hearts and minds of the many visitors to the Eltham Cemetery.

Rita Woolley is the Secretary of the Eltham Cemetery Trust, Victoria. This story was first published in the December 2020 edition of Plot Matters - the newsletter of the Australasian Cemeteries & Crematoria Association (ACCA)

Earth buildings were common throughout pioneer Australia. The Avoca, Ballarat, Beechworth and Bendigo goldfield regions, as well as the Sunraysia and Murray regions in Victoria have had many such buildings from this era. A small handful still survive.

Older earth and wattle and daub buildings hark back to the brief gold rush days in the Caledonian Goldfields in the northern and eastern areas of the Nillumbik Shire, principally Warrandyte, Queenstown (St Andrews), Smiths Gully, Panton Hill and Hurstbridge.

Earth was discarded as a building medium as it was historically considered as a medium for temporary structures that would be replaced by more 'substantial' timber or brick structures, as soon as funds could be found, as it was strongly associated with poverty,

John Harcourt, Justus Jorgensen and others in the 1930's and '40s began the revival of earth building into its modern form.

These people began erecting substantial buildings with a clear understanding of design principles and practical site applications. Jorgensen, at the expanding Montsalvat with its many mixtures of European architectural styles and Harcourt, who erected a few beautifully built homes along classic French provincial lines close to the Eltham Town Centre contributed greatly to the local acceptance of earth buildings.



Early earth building at Montsalvat
Photograph by Jim Connor - September 2010

These were substantial structures built as principal residences and built to last. And, most importantly post-war, it was cheap. Locally there began a genuine interest in and critical examining of domestic architecture in society.

This was paralleled, and certainly influenced by the growing awareness and consciousness of the Australian garden landscape pioneers. Local Melbourne landscape architect Edna Walling along with her principal contractors Eric Hammond and Ellis (Rocky) Stone, had significant impact. She had regular gardening columns in the press from the late 1920's to the 1950's, that championed the idea of buildings, gardens and site as a holistic principle. Eltham understudies Gordon Ford and Ivan Stranger were significant local influences.

Alistair Knox played a critical role in the earth building revival. Early post war he was a bank clerk by day and by night studied building construction at the Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT).

Post war, building controls were practically non-existent. Mandatory local council funded building inspections did not begin until the late 1950's (although council building approvals were required) and the Victorian Uniform Building Regulations did not come into full operation until the late '70's.

Banks were the de facto regulators, as they wouldn't lend for housing unless their inspectors and their lending guidelines gave their approval. This was a serious impediment to the emerging mud brick building industry as capital was not forthcoming.

Alistair, the bank employee, armed by a CSIRO earth building test paper lobbied the local Eltham Shire Council who accepted adobe as a bona fide building method. Without his direct initiative, earth building would have stopped in its tracks.

After banking, Alistair began to make his mark as a building designer. He pioneered the softer 'Australian' architectural look or model with its lower, flatter roof line, often with a clerestory to introduce light to the centre of the house and large windows to the living areas to bring the 'outside in'.

Natural materials and finishes were de rigueur. Large eaves and verandahs complemented this. He popularised and legitimised mud brick buildings in mainstream society. This acceptance spawned the next generation of builders and designers - John Pizzey, Clifton Pugh in the Dunmoochin area in Cottles Bridge, Rose, Bateman and Manley, Robert Marshall, John Cust, Hamish Knox, Peter Jarvis and Barry Wilde, to name just a very few, along with countless gifted craftsmen and inspired owner builders.

The result is that the Nillumbik Shire has a substantial stock of beautifully designed, built and finished earth buildings which form a pivotal part of the Nillumbik heritage.

In the next issues of our newsletter we will look at a few of these homes that had, and still have, such a positive influence in the Eltham area.

....from Dust to Dust

Neil Douglas

The architecture of Eltham has been greatly influenced by the work of Jorgensen at 'Montsalvat'. His demonstration of the use of natural materials perhaps had much to do with the breakaway from the cream brick and fibro syndrome that seemed to dominate so much domestic architecture. Builders like John Harcourt, Judd and Alistair Knox owe much to the techniques sought and developed by those at 'Montsalvat'. Indeed many of these people came to Eltham because of Jorgensen and spent many hours at his dining table, arguing and discussing aesthetics and the ways of man.

In the building of 'Montsalvat' Jorgensen has endeavoured to use many forms and styles blended together, to use any materials at hand, bringing it out but never allowing it to dominate; he has been able to use his tradesmen and his students in the same way as the great builders of the Middle Ages. 'Montsalvat' is a unity with one concept but contains the work of many artists and craftsmen. As one walks around 'Montsalvat' one sees various little dormer windows, gargoyles, corbels, balconies, wrought iron works and carvings, which all show a perverse sauciness in their differing proportions and projections, yet contain a sort of affinity. The same thing is echoed in Jorgensen's paintings of which there are many examples on view in the studio and Great Hall.

Justus Jorgensen says he 'dislikes modern art because of its monotony of line and unawareness of nature's accent'. Thus it is the same in architecture, he says. He is not interested in being original. He likes to contemplate and discover marvellous workshops of another age and of other artists. The art scene in Eltham during the thirties and forties was largely dominated by Justus Jorgensen and his students and the building of 'Montsalvat'.

But when World War 11 was over, Eltham as a district once again began to attract a new generation of artists. This time the attention was not only the variety and beauty of the Eltham landscape, but the existence of an attractive social climate, the possibility of a relaxed and informal way of life after the rigidity and monotony of years of war and the opportunities which existed for building oneself a house or studio of local materials in the manner ably demonstrated by the builders of 'Montsalvat'. The range of these artists was now greatly extended from traditional painters to abstractionists, ceramic artists, sculptors, jewellers, potters and others.

William (Jock) Frater

In 1910 William 'Jock' Frater arrived in Melbourne from Scotland and got a job at Brooks Robinson. He was nineteen years old, an itinerant painter and hadn't been in Melbourne very long before he met Percy Leason and Richard McGann, who were both working as lithographers with Sands and McDougall. Jock Frater asked them where, near Melbourne, he should go to paint and they both replied 'Eltham'.

On a Saturday afternoon shortly afterwards, Frater took a late train from Princes Bridge to Eltham. At Heidelberg all but one carriage was unhooked from the engine before the train continued on its way into the country and to Eltham. It was a winter's day and quite dark when the train pulled up at the Eltham station; Frater was intrigued to see the few people left on the train alight, walk along to the platform to the ticket office, take down their hurricane lamps from a row of pegs on the wall, light them and make their several ways into the dark bush which seemed to surround all the station. Frater stood and watched the pale glimmering lights disappearing in several directions and wondered which way to go. He finally decided to go in a southerly direction and after a long walk he settled down for the night at what must have been the spot where the creek crosses Yarra Braes Road near Sweeneys Lane. (Many times at a later date Frater and Percy Leason camped on this spot. They used to call the creek 'Blow Fly Creek'.)

He slept out that night on a bed of gum leaves and next morning he wandered down to the Yarra, then made his way back to the township where he was delighted to find he could get a bacon and egg breakfast, which he ate in the company of two timber cutters, at the local store.

Frater and Percy Leason became firm friends; sometimes together, at other times with Richard McCann, Hugh and Hector Paterson, Stewart Vincent and a Frenchman, Louis Foulez, they spent their weekends painting, at Eltham and along the Maribyrnong River. Many times during those weekends Frater and Leason would camp the night near Bible and Pitt streets. In the winter-time they would build a huge fire in the afternoon, let it go out, and at night rake over the ashes and doss down on the warm earth. Next morning it was something of a competition to see who could get cleaned up first, for they were always completely covered in ashes.

This was during the two or three years immediately proceeding World War 1 and Frater recalls that Eltham seemed to be full of timber cutters; he remembers how he and Leason were saddened that so many magnificent trees, 'huge white gums' as he recalled them, were being felled at that time.

Another favourite spot for their weekend sketching was along the Diamond Creek where Judge Book Memorial Village is now. Frater recalls that there were two swaggies, or rabbiters, who had little huts along the east side of the creek and sometimes after completing a sketch they would be asked to have 'a cup of tea at one of the huts'.



William(Jock) Frater 1890 -1974
Photograph from Pioneers & Painters

During the war they also met a man at this spot who was painting in watercolours. His name was Phillips and although a bank manager by vocation, he was a painter in watercolours by choice. This small corner of Eltham, with its tall manna gums and bounded by the creek, was the favourite spot for Phillips to paint and for this reason, and also because he could not bear to think of those fine gums being cut down, Phillips bought this land with an old house on it and built some additions to the house, which he intended to give to his son on his son's return from the war. But young Phillips was killed in France and the property was sold to a poultry farmer and later to Ambrose Erswell, who was the first person in Australia to start a dry-cleaning business – 'Gouge'. In the 1950s the property was sold by the Erswells and it is now the Judge Book Memorial Village. However, it is possible that the fine trees still standing around the village were saved by the love of a painter.



William (Jock) Frater - 1971
Photograph - EDHS *

Frater also recalls the little farm on the west side of the Diamond Creek with its old picturesque, but already decrepit, stone and hand made brick house with a slate roof, the ivy creepers even then beginning to eat into its fretting stonework. Its owners, the O'Callaghan sisters, would appear from time to time, but even then were aloof, almost recluse like figures from another age.

In 1916 Jock Frater married and he and his wife bought a house and small property on the corner of Arthur and Bible streets. They lived in Eltham for about a year, then moved to Alphington where he and W.B. McInnes bought adjoining land.

Source: From *Pioneers and Painters – One Hundred Years of Eltham and Its Shire* – Pages 113-116
These words were written by local artist Peter Glass.

Footnote from wikipedia.org

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Frater

In 1936 Frater visited a flat in South Yarra owned by well-to-do Lina Bryans (née Hallenstein in Germany) to advise her on stained-glass windows, and painted her portrait. With his help and encouragement she decided to become an artist, producing her first works early in 1937, from which Basil Burdett (1897–1942) selected her *Backyards*, South Yarra for the 'Herald Exhibition of Outstanding Pictures of 1937.'

One of Frater's best known works is *The Red Hat*, a portrait of Bryans dating from that year. She, using her inheritance, purchased Ambrose Hallen's former hotel-cum-studio at 899 Heidelberg Road, Darebin in which Ada May Plante had been living, and with her painted and decorated it distinctively, naming it "The Pink Hotel".

Over the next decade Frater and she lived and painted there together after his separation from Winifred. The artists' colony included Plante, Hallen, Ian Fairweather, Arnold Shore and other artists, and attracted a group of writers associated with the journal *Meanjin*. Part of their circle were Nina and Clem Christesen whose 'Stanhope' in Eltham they frequented. Bryans sold the Darebin property in 1948, moving to Harkaway, near Berwick, then overseas in 1953.

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

John Wright Murray

Irish-born John Murray and his wife Mary (daughter of Thomas Sweeney) married in 1849 and settled in Eltham North. Their block of about 80 acres, called "Laurel Hill", was on the eastern side of the Diamond Creek, extending east to beyond Zig Zag Road. It was later extended south by the purchase of a further 60 acres. John died in 1867 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with Mary and two of their grandchildren.



Old barn on Murray's land
Photograph - EDHS collection

Their eldest son Johnnie inherited the property. Then in about 1902 his younger brother James purchased about 50 acres on the western side of the Diamond Creek immediately opposite Laurel Hill, extending west to slightly past Wattle tree Road. Eltham North Reserve now lies just beyond the southern boundary. James built a family home on top of the hill on the northern boundary, together with a dairy and milking shed and a food cellar. It is thought that the barn with stables was already there. When Johnnie died in 1912, the two properties (though severed by both the creek and the railway line) effectively merged. The land was worked as an orchard with apples, pears, quinces, and possibly apricots and peaches. Later it became a dairy farm.

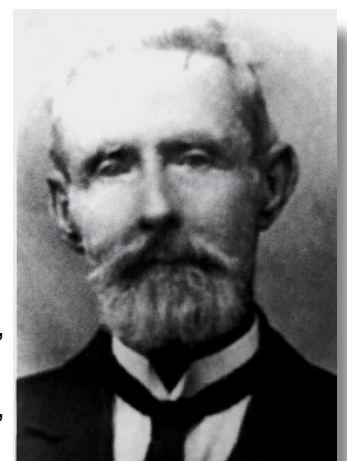
By 1986, most of the land had been sold off and the house was unfit for habitation. John's grandson Jim retained a small portion of the land and built a new house. He kept the old one as a storage shed, but it was demolished after he died in 1993. The very old barn is still standing.

Main sources: Research by Alan Sheehan; extensive unpublished research by John Sabine (copy held by EDHS).

Thomas Henry Orford

One of Eltham's earliest settlers was James Orford. He was a carpenter who built the original gates to Eltham Cemetery. He died in 1869.

In around 1890, his son Thomas Henry Orford was living in Pitt Street. After his wife Helen died in 1899, Thomas was appointed by Joseph Panton to look after "Panton Park", a 429-acre bushland property at the fork of Reynolds and Laughing Waters roads, extending down to the Yarra River. His work entailed ringbarking the manna gums on the property in order to clear the land for pasture. He lived in a slab hut with his son Ernie, who helped with the work. When Gordon Lyon purchased Panton Park in 1908, Thomas then worked for Lyon at both Panton Park and at "Banyule", Lyon's stud farm at Heidelberg. In 1915 Lyon gave Thomas six acres of land in Reynolds Road with a two-roomed cottage. Thomas died in 1944 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife and his parents.



Thomas Henry Orford
Photograph - geni.com

Another of James Orford's sons was James Matthias Orford. He tried to grow food on land at the end of Laughing Waters Road, but without success. Reputedly the Wurundjeri taught him to swim. He was once imprisoned: when his friend Constable Lawlor invited him to inspect the new bluestone lock-up, Lawlor locked him in and wouldn't release him until he was promised two gallons of beer!

Main source: "Laughing Waters Road" by Jane Woollard.

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 generous support we receive from Nillumbik Shire Council

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