

Newsletter

No. 259 August 2021



The Pen

Jim Connor

It was once written that: *'To Change The World You Will Need A Pen'*.

Well, this pen may not have changed the world but the words written by it will have changed the lives of many people; for some in a minor way, for others more significantly.

This pen may have been used to record Mr. F. Hare's thoughts on Wednesday 28th January 1891 when he decided to fine William Ivorey 10 shillings, after he was arrested by Senior Constable Dungey for being drunk while in charge of a horse.

Mr. Hare may also have written on the same day about the comments of Constable Waldron (for the Heidelberg Shire Council) when the owner of a roaming cow found wandering the streets of Diamond Creek was fined 2 shillings, 6 pence, together with one pound, 16 shillings and 6 pence costs and if the cow is not claimed to be sold.

On Tuesday 22nd December 1892 Major Bartrop may have noted his comments about Jack Vyante who was charged for stealing clothes etc., to the value of 6 pounds 10 shillings, from the dwelling of Arthur Rooks at Diamond Creek.

The nib in this pen may have been dipped in an inkwell prior to recording the names of various parents fined 10 shillings, on Tuesday 9th November 1920, for neglecting to have their children vaccinated, while a similar case against Ethel J. Richardson was adjourned until the 25th January 1921. On the same day Edgar Boyall and William Hatch were each fined 4 shillings for neglecting to send their children to school.

Perhaps on 17 April 1928 it was used when Thomas Marchband was charged to show cause why a warrant of commitment should not be issued as he had not paid two fines issued a month earlier for driving an unregistered car and driving without a licence.

So while we don't exactly know how many lives this well worn pen may have been part of, we do know where it was used. It was discovered in the Eltham Court House below the magistrate's bench when this was recently removed from where it was installed in 1860. This bench along with other original furniture is being refurbished, as part of the appreciated restoration of this valued heritage building, by many talented specialists.

Once this work is completed the Eltham Court House will continue to be an important feature of our local history, as well as a reminder of the importance of the justice process for people throughout the district, from early pioneer days until court activities ceased there in 1984.



Annual General Meeting

2.00pm Saturday 14th August 2021

Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre

Library Place, Eltham (Melway Map 21 ref J5)

Heritage Excursion

Memorial Park, Kangaroo Ground

2.00pm Saturday 4th September 2021

See further details on page 2

The creek known as Karingal Yallock passes through the front of the former Hat Factory at 197 Sherbourne Road, Eltham and the creek environs are the subject of significant and unusual landscaping works.

A Heritage Report by Graeme Butler and Associates in 2006 provides a detailed site history and mentions the garden was a highly orchestrated design using coloured concrete, stone (grey granite) and mosaic tiles. The plan was based on intersecting circle segments in stone and concrete with a serpentine



Remnants of the serpentine channel winding through trees
Photograph - Jim Connor

channel route winding through trees, as counterpoint to a more formal geometry. Unfortunately some of the remaining landscaping was damaged by the Christmas Day floods of 2011.

The well-known brand of Fayrefield Hats was manufactured at this factory and these had a high reputation when hats were essential for all gentlemen; once every man typically had a hat.

While we identify this property as a manufacturing operation what is not generally widely known is the highly orchestrated design of the garden, with the intersecting circle segments, provided outstanding and challenging opportunities for many early skateboard riders.

For a few years during the 1970s this site was known by skateboarders as the Pond, a training ground that attracted many enthusiasts, from juniors to some of the top riders, who came from near and far, no matter what the weather. Many used the bowls and banks there to learn new skills while developing individual styles and techniques. They went on to create their own history at this place and elsewhere, as is recorded on the Vic Skate History website.

Empty backyard pools were also another way of experiencing new challenges in what was to become a popular youth subculture featuring tricks later performed in urban environments using stairs, rails, ledges and other obstacles.

Fort Knox Self Storage now operates in the former hat factory and it is thought the pools that provided so many thrills and testing times for early skateboarders were built over during later building extensions.

Sources: Shire of Nillumbik Heritage Report - Graeme Butler and Associates (2006)

Vic Skate History - <https://www.vicskatehistory.com/1977-pools>

Discussions with David Partridge, an early skateboarder - July 2021

Heritage Excursion - Saturday 4th September

Our next heritage excursion will be at the Memorial Park at Kangaroo Ground, where the Shire of Eltham War Memorial (tower) is located. This excursion will also commemorate the centenary of the official opening of this Memorial Park on 3 September 1921.

This excursion on Saturday 4th September will take about 1.5 hours, starting at 2pm in the carpark area in the Memorial Park. This free excursion is open to the 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. Masks should be carried and any COVID safe practices must be complied with.

Based on an oral presentation during the EDHS Woodridge Wander excursion on 6th March 2021

Our home – the Kinloch Barn is a place we love. We've been here close to 20 years and were the first people outside the Jelbart family to own it.

Wendy, my wife comes from Greensborough and we met in Sydney where I grew up. Our relationship quickly developed, and she invited me down to Melbourne to meet her folks.

It was 1967 and my primary job was to ask Wendy's dad if I could marry her. That was soon settled and she took me to Montsalvat where her brother Peter Green, having recently graduated from RMIT school of gold and silversmithing, was working in Matcham Skipper's workshop.

At that time, I was as an education officer with the Commonwealth Government in Papua New Guinea. I never related to the teaching job as I always wanted to design and make things. Walking into Montsalvat and meeting Matcham Skipper and seeing what Peter was doing in the workshop made me realise I had found what I wanted to do in life. After being introduced to Eltham by Janet Sinclair (nee Grounds), Wendy had since her late-teens a desire to marry an artist and live in a mud brick house in Eltham.

After a couple more years of finishing my government contract we moved from Sydney to Eltham and bought our first house in Elsa Court.

In 1974 we began a gold and silversmithing business, which became quite successful and by 1985 I asked Matcham Skipper to open our new gallery at 725 Main Rd. Some years later we arrived at a point getting close to 60 where we decided to move out of our residence behind our gallery and look for a quieter place to live.

Friends of ours were among the first residents to purchase one of the new houses in the Kinloch Gardens Estate at 93 Arthur Street. Even though we had been living in the centre of Eltham for 30 odd years we had no idea of the Kinloch property at the top of the Arthur Street hill. We contacted the owner, Ian Jelbart who we understood was the developer and architect. He and his family had lived there since the early 1940s.

We expressed an interest in purchasing one of the new modern houses being built. There were two blocks of land left so he invited us into the Barn House, the original mud brick house built by his family on the property, to show us what the view would be like. Well, we lost immediate interest in the modern houses and in no short time we negotiated and bought the place.

We moved into the Barn in 2002 and feel so privileged to own it because it is such a very special place. It is well structured and has that mud brick and historic content we loved. I have only ever lived in Eltham for the last 50 years, so I don't intend to go anywhere else.



Michael Wilson and some of our 'Woodridge Wander' group
Photograph - Jim Connor

The nice part is I grew up with a father who built houses and I always wanted to be like him with his ability to use tools and build things. I could see even though the place was some 50 years old and very primitive I could fix whatever needed to be done. We went through a whole process of being careful not to destroy but protect the original history. All paving stones, as well as the bricks, have been numbered, pulled up and put back in the same place, but on a concrete slab. We had to add new bricks to complete some of the paving.



The Jelbart Barn Photograph - Jim Connor

We rebuilt parts of the building which had deteriorated with age, so they were the same as they were. We rebuilt the pergola except for the carvings I put on there. One interesting aspect when we bought it, I contacted a fellow we knew who assessed houses for people intending to purchase. He checked the structure to see if there were white ants. When he arrived, he said "I don't believe it!" and I said "What do you mean?" He explained "I am English and my job as a builder in England was to renovate English barns into living quarters and I can tell you now, this is an English barn!". He knew the distances between the posts and beams along with the pitch of the roof and so on. I measured them later and he was exactly right.

So we have an English barn. It was built in 1945; sometimes this is the subject of a lot of discussion and even Ian Jelbart was unsure if it was built in 1945 or 1946, but one thing is sure you can't dispute a photograph. The government took an aerial survey of the whole of Melbourne in 1945, where you can identify Main Road, Bible Street and Arthur Street. It peters out, but you can easily see the Jelbart Estate at the top of the hill and the barn there. How finished it was is another matter.



Michael Wilson discussing the 1945 aerial survey
Photograph - Jim Connor

As I understand it 'The Barn' was originally meant to be a hobby farmhouse with a dairy, as well as a temporary house for the family to live in whilst, over several years, they built the significantly bigger and grand Manor House, some 75 metres away.

The Barn consists of a building some 70 feet long running east to west but facing north. The main building is on three levels with a high-pitched roof, the northern face of which is slate and the southern is iron. There are two smaller single storey buildings attached to the main building. The first was a three-division car port with a work area and storage cupboards. The second included a dairy room with cow stalls.

On the ground level in the centre of the main building is an open breezeway. On the western side is an entrance foyer, followed by a laundry/shower/toilet room with a cinder floor, then two small bedrooms. On the eastern side is a large office room. On the first floor at the western end was a lounge area featuring a built-in lounge. In the middle over the breezeway was a breakfast area and a galley kitchen. On the eastern end was a very large dining area.

When Mrs.Theo Handfield subdivided land in 1924 to the west of the Diamond Creek in Eltham she named Peter Street and John Street after her two sons. However, the name of John Street was later changed, due to possible confusion with the other John Street off Main Road. It then became Fay Street, after Fay Harcourt the wife of the well-known local builder John Harcourt.

So we know how the name of Peter Street originated, based on the first Peter connection, but do we know of some of the other people named Peter who have actually lived in Peter Street.

Peter and Diana Bassett-Smith, resided there for a number of years during their early married days before moving to Kangaroo Ground. They were founding members of the original Shire of Eltham Historical Society, now the Eltham District Historical Society and are honorary life members. He was our second president from 1976-1980 and a committee member for many years.

Peter came with his parents to live in York Street, Eltham in 1928. He enlisted in the AIF in 1939 and served overseas. After the war he returned to Australia and pursued his interests in cine-photography and photography, including in Arnhem Land in 1948 and he was the honorary photographer for later visits of the Queen and Prince Phillip. He had an extraordinary life and contributed to many community organisations, including the Kangaroo Ground Pony Club, the Kangaroo Ground CFA, the Andrew Ross Museum and was Nillumbik Citizen of the Year in 2001.

Another Peter associated with Peter Street is Peter Moore the former VFL player for Collingwood and Melbourne. Peter first played competitive football for the Eltham under 13s. In later years he won many awards, including the Brownlow medal in 1979 while playing for Collingwood. After retiring from VFL football he coached Eltham Football Club, including to a second division premiership in 1989. Peter's son Darcy Moore is currently making a significant impact playing for Collingwood. The Moore family built and lived in a house in Peter Street, now owned by Russell and Marion Yeoman. Russell is a founding member of EDHS and our secretary since 1969.

We have recently become aware another Peter who has lived in Peter Street is television personality Peter Hitchener, who has been associated with Channel Nine News in Melbourne since 1998. In a recent interview on Melbourne radio station SEN Peter indicated he lived in Peter Street in the 1970s, when it was a time of great fun. It was actually in a cottage next to the Moore's house. He said Eltham then was like nowhere else and he did make mention of safari suits, mud brick houses, progressive dinner parties and even local street festivals. Peter also spoke about the Great Omelette Joust, but was somewhat vague on details.

In Joy Jobbin's book "Shoestring - a memoir" Joy tells of living in Eltham in the 1950s. Joy mentions the Annual Omelette Joust, which went from 1963 to 1981. In this contest local men pitted their skills against each other.....apparently wine may have also been involved. They competed for a trophy of sorts, a chain containing engraved medallions recording the names of the Eltham Joust champions. Some years ago this trophy was donated to our society.

So, in addition to the known local history of the naming of Peter Street, it is interesting to note there are also many other associated memories linked to people named Peter.



Annual Omelette Joust Trophy
Photograph - EDHS collection

Annual General Meeting - 2.00pm, Saturday 14th August 2021

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Eltham District Historical Society Incorporated will now be at 2.00pm on Saturday 14th August 2021, at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre. The agenda of the Annual General Meeting is set out below in accordance with the Society's rules:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2020 Annual General Meeting
3. Reports
 - a. President's Report
 - b. Financial Report
 - c. Any other reports
4. Election of office bearers and ordinary members of committee, positions to be filled as follows:
President
Senior Vice President
Junior Vice President
Society Secretary
Treasurer/Membership Secretary
Ordinary Committee Members (minimum of three members)
5. Election of Membership Sub-Committee (three members)
6. Fixing of entrance fee (if any) and annual subscription
7. Any other business of which at least three weeks notice has been given to members

It should be noted that under the Society's rules nominations for all positions are to be made at the meeting. You are welcome to contribute to the operation of our Society by becoming an office bearer or committee member.

Everyone attending our AGM will be required to sign an EDHS registration sheet and scan in using a QR Code. COVID safe practices will be in place during the meeting and serving of refreshments.

We are very pleased our Guest Speaker at this meeting will be Mark Cauchi, who will speak on the *Eltham to Hurstbridge Railway – The line through the valley of the Diamond*.

Mark is a lifelong rail enthusiast whose interest in railways was encouraged by his grandfather who worked for the Victorian Railways for 48 years. As a long-term member of the former Australian Railway Historical Society, Mark is an active railway historian and has worked voluntarily as part of the Newsrail editorial team for the past ten years. Currently, he is the magazine's features editor.

The railway between Eltham and Hurstbridge was primarily built to service the fruit growers of the Diamond Creek Valley, and beyond to Kinglake. It was opened by the Premier, William Watt, on 25 June 1912. Despite being well patronised by passengers and the growers, the line was one of many in the state that was not a paying concern. This presentation will provide a glimpse into the extension of the railway from Eltham, its purpose, construction, provision of the three stations, opening, passenger and goods services, special trains and the financial problems of the first five years. It will also cover the electrification of the line in 1926 and the types of rolling stock used from that period through to the current day. A selection of historic and current-day images will be shown.

Originally published in the Grass Roots Earth Builder's Companion - 1981

In my 34th year of mud brick design and construction I am conscious of being more committed to it than ever before. From both an architectural and structural viewpoint I find earth walls make the most creative and exciting buildings there are. They are inspiring to live in, provide excellent insulation against heat and sound and combine perfectly with every other natural material. Properly used it can produce that timeless quality which is the hallmark of all true architectural building.

There is also a great social ingredient in mud brick construction. All able-bodied persons can build in it if they follow a few simple rules. It does not require a long apprenticeship. In fact, I have seen a lot of earth wall buildings erected by men and women who never dreamed they could or would build anything in their lives. Best of all my experience has been that women are as good, if not better at it than men! Building their own house develops a great sense of identity and turns the most modest people into important members of their community. It gives them confidence in all other activities that they undertake. Those that become seriously involved in mud brick building become life long converts to it and prefer to live in a mud brick house rather than any other type of structure.

Much is made of the economic advantages of earth buildings, but I find the over emphasis on this aspect can cloud the finest qualities it offers. I am convinced that it is the best building medium there is rather than the cheapest. If an owner builder does all the work himself, and improvises well, he can obviously produce a much cheaper building than by any other method. When he costs his labour into the work however, the result is not greatly cheaper than for other building mediums. The real advantage is the spirit and personal character it offers. Professionally built houses we have designed can be 15% to 20% cheaper than for brick or timber if the working conditions are comparable.

Earth building should be designed and built with style rather than to a style. It should take its accent from the surrounding environment and relate to it in 'feeling' so that house and land have a sense of INdivisibility. They should become one entity. It is the environmental builder's ultimate medium - the alternative life system par excellence.

Earth building is at its best when it is in the hands of creative and artistic people who can exploit its sculptural qualities that enhance its living spirit. This gives each proper example a 'one off' character and individuality. It can make marvellous buildings anywhere throughout Australia and is in fact becoming widely used. If the present trend continues it will become a major influence in our national building during the present decade.

Banks and Lending Societies are pleased to lend on it throughout Victoria and in most other States.



The Downing/Le Gallienne House - c1957
Photograph - EDHS collection - donated by Alistair Knox

Earth buildings are being sold for as much as \$200,000 around Melbourne. Perhaps this demand for it by the richer section of society may be a threat. It would be catastrophic if it became the 'in thing' of the wealthy, because some very low cost examples are as beautiful as the expensive ones and truer in concept and character.

The three examples illustrated were designed and built between 1948 and 1978. They are all in excellent condition today and have been almost entirely maintenance free.

The Busst House (1948) has a slab floor on the lower level. It was only the third such that we ever designed and probably one of the first ten used in domestic building in Australia.

The Downing/Le Gallienne House was built in four stages between 1948 and 1964. This photograph was taken after completion of the third stage in 1957.

The third example is our own house which has been developed in a series of stages between 1965 and 1978. We have found it excellent to live in as well as to look at.

The slate, brick and timber floors were all laid on a 25 mm mortar bed and the slab has been deleted. The result has caused considerable economies without any problems. It is, of course, essential to watch the drainage to the building in such circumstances.

One of the greatest qualities of earth building is its sense of freedom of design and construction. We point load most of our buildings which allows the removal and alteration of a lot of walls at any time. It is also generally quite easy to change your mind about design and details whilst the work is proceeding.

The one point I would emphasise in conclusion is the importance of sound organisation. It is essential to know how you will conclude your structure detailing before you start.

At a public meeting called in 1967 to consider whether Eltham needed a historical society Alistair Knox formally moved the motion to establish our society. He was then a foundation member and a member of our initial committee.



The Busst House

Photograph - EDHS collection - donated by Alistair Knox



The Knox House

Photograph - EDHS collection - donated by Alistair Knox

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

Benjamin Oliver Wallis

Cornish-born Benjamin Wallis, an experienced builder, emigrated to Melbourne in 1853 and came to Eltham. In about 1854 he built the Eltham Hotel for its first owner Richard Warren. It was constructed from local hard basaltic bluestone and brick, with fourteen rooms. Wallis purchased it in 1858 and made renovations in 1859. It thrived, soon surpassing the Evelyn Hotel across the road. In the 1860s it was the venue for auction sales, election meetings, Eltham Racing Club meetings, even Church meetings. Wallis was an active member of St Margaret's Church and in 1869 donated stone to build the new Anglican parsonage. He was an Eltham Shire Councillor between 1880 and 1887.

The house which is now part of the Living and Learning Centre at Eltham is thought to have been built by Wallis in about 1857 for its owner John Pearson. Wallis bought it in 1868 and continued to live there. He also owned most of the land now traversed by Antoinette Boulevard, as well as various other blocks around Eltham.

Benjamin Wallis retired as publican in 1886, selling the Eltham Hotel. He died in 1896 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Anna and son Richard.

Main source: Detailed research by Christopher Wallis in 2015 (copy held by EDHS).

Christopher Watson

In 1887 Christopher Watson became licensee of the Eltham Hotel. It hosted meetings of the local Racing and Rifle Clubs and was the venue for a land auction sale, a political rally and various community meetings. It was also a stopping place for Cobb & Co coaches, which no doubt boosted patronage. Although the Evelyn Hotel across the road was a competitor, Christopher Watson helped to extinguish a fire there in 1892.



Eltham Hotel - when owned by Christopher Watson
* Photograph - EDHS collection

Things did not always go well. In his very first year as publican, he was charged with keeping the hotel open after hours: his excuse was that the patrons refused to leave at closing time! In 1893, when out shooting rabbits with friends, he was accidentally shot in the leg and another bullet grazed his face near his right eye. He was incapacitated for a time but recovered.

He died in 1909 and is buried in Eltham Cemetery with his wife Emily. The old Eltham Hotel was demolished in 1925; the present structure bears no resemblance to it.

Main source: Evelyn Observer.

Correction

In the Cemetery Story about Pauline Toner in our June newsletter we incorrectly mentioned she was cremated and her ashes interred at the Eltham Cemetery. Pauline Toner is buried in the lawn section at the Eltham Cemetery and we apologise for our mistake.

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We appreciate the generous support we receive from Nillumbik Shire Council

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

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*Any images displayed in this newsletter from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection are held in partnership between Eltham District Historical Society and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library)



ELTHAM CEMETERY

EST. 1858

Burial Grounds: Mt Pleasant Road, Eltham

www.elthamcemetery.com



Our Eltham, Our History

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