Eltham District Historical Society

Newsletter

No. 262 February 2022

Well….how time flies!
<div align="right">Jim Connor</div>

It does not seem that long ago we were planning to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Eltham District Historical Society, which commenced as the Shire of Eltham Historical Society, following a public meeting on 6 June 1967.

Now we look forward to entering our 55th year after a couple of rocky ones, due to a virus no one would ever have anticipated. COVID - 19 has been written into the history books of every nation and into the personal history of every individual.

When looking back at the history of our Society it is important to recognise and celebrate the many, many people who have contributed their time, skills, passion and commitment to support our Society and to ensure it has continued to present, value and express the importance of protecting our heritage and maintaining memories of the past, our significant local history.

Since the first meeting in 1967 many members have been formally and informally involved in creating our own 'history' and in the last five years we have built another layer on the solid foundations they developed.

We have been fortunate to have been able to partner with our Council along the way, initially with Eltham Shire Council and since municipal restructure in 1994 with Nillumbik Shire Council, which has been and is very supportive. The recent restoration of the historic Eltham Courthouse is an excellent example of such collaboration.

We acknowledge and thank each and every one of our member 'friends' and our supporters who have invested their energy, passion and skills in the continuing story of our Society, as we look forward to continuing to recognise, record and celebrate our valuable local history.

Like many other not for profit organisations, our Society has needed to adapt to COVID restrictions, including the way we operate.

We need to be responsive to any future changes in circumstances, which may be reflected in how we present our meetings, heritage excursions and other activities. In doing so we will still endeavour to provide services in the best interests of our members. Our Annual Program distributed with the newsletter may be subject to change to respond to any such restrictions.

Heritage Excursion - Eltham Cemetery - Saturday 5 March 2022

Stories connect us to our local heritage. March is Women's History Month. During our first excursion of the year, we will recognise the contributions of some local women to our community. Nestled on high ground, once overlooking the village of Eltham we will tour the Eltham Cemetery and share stories of women now interred in these grounds.

From pioneer women to the first woman in Eltham to attend University. From the silent film actress to the community spirited politician. From the post mistress to the World War One nurse.

This free excursion is open to the general public as well as members and friends of the Society. Dogs are not permitted. Enter the car park from Metery Road, Eltham, follow signs for parking and note this walk is on uneven ground in places. Please meet at the rotunda near the lake, for 2.00 pm start on Saturday 5 March 2022, 2.00pm – 3.30pm. Bookings are not necessary and any COVID requirements will be in place.

The Eltham District Historical Society appreciates the support we receive from the Eltham Cemetery Trust, including being able to undertake our heritage excursions within the well maintained, attractive grounds of their cemetery.

Park On Hill Crest

The Herald (Melbourne, Vic:1861-1954) - Thursday 5 February 1925

A walk to Garden Hill amply compensates for the energy expended on the trip. Here the Shire of Eltham has set aside a reserve of two acres on the crest of the hill as a Memorial Park.

A cairn is erected in the Park pending the construction of a suitable memorial, towards which the sum of £250 has been collected. From the cairn a wonderful panoramic view extends across the Bay to the You Yangs in one direction, and in another across hills and valleys to Mount Macedon — the Camel's Hump being clearly visible. To the north Yan Yean and Kinglake suggest pleasant walking tours. The Yarra is only a few miles distant. A visitor would fail to recognise in this clear, fast-flowing stream the turgid colored river at Prince's Bridge. A series of rapids are well worth a visit, while the stream accommodates for the convenience of the fishermen a supply of cod and trout.

Source:https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/243721319?searchTerm=

Eltham Licensing Meeting

The Argus - Thursday 17th December 1883

The annual licensing meeting was held on Monday, before Mr. Hare, P.M., and Messrs. Bell and Duncan, J.P.'s, when the following licences were renewed:— Eltham Hotel, B. C. Wallis; Evelyn, James Purcell; Lower Plenty, Joseph Lithgow; Research Gully, Wm. West, sen.; Weller's Hotel, Mary Weller; Kangaroo Ground, Sophia Greenaway; Evelyn Arms, Laurence Brennan; Royal Mail, Nicholas Butler; and Diamond Creek, Edmund Pickett.

No objections were raised in any instance.

That was then…..

Liz Pidgeon

Eltham Shire 100 years ago (1921)

By the end of 1921, the population of the Shire of Eltham was 4,073. The effects of the Great War remained in the community conscious with a number of memorial projects unveiled and the publication of C.W. Bean's official war history.

In February, the "infants' room", an extension of the Eltham Primary School was opened. At the same time an honour board, "erected in honour of those who had attended the school and enlisted during the great war" was unveiled. In September town water was provided to the school, replacing reliance on water tank storage.

In June, "a cenotaph erected to the memory of the fallen soldiers of the district" was unveiled at Diamond Creek.

Electrification of the railway line from Heidelberg to Eltham commenced.

The Eltham Shire Memorial Park was formerly opened in Kangaroo Ground, in honour of all those from the Shire who enlisted.

In December the Christmas Hills Soldiers War Memorial was unveiled.

The primary school at Upper Diamond Creek closed and re-formed at Balee (now known as Wattle Glen).

At the close of early spring, near Eltham, 1921
Artist: Robert Joseph Haddon (1866-1929)
State Library Victoria Collection

Died in 1921: William Taylor, former Councillor died aged 68 years. A life-long resident of Eltham, member of the Rechabite Lodge (part of the temperance movement) and a Justice of the Peace.

Born in 1921: Matcham Skipper, sculptor and jeweller who would be associated with Montsalvat.
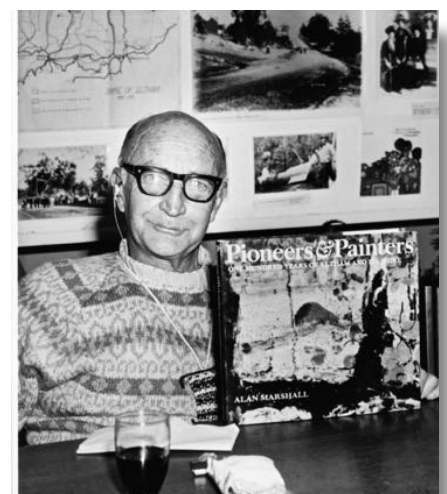
Eltham Shire 50 years ago (1971)

By 1971 the population of the Shire of Eltham was 24,140. The population of Eltham township was 7,117.

The year was dominated by the Shire of Eltham centenary celebrations* from March to August. The idea to develop a book on the history of the Shire of Eltham to be edited by noted author, Alan Marshall in celebration of the shire's centenary was initiated in 1969. The Shire of Eltham Historical Society undertook significant research in conjunction with Alan Marshall locating material at various institutions and other societies; interviewing longer term residents and a public campaign to collect photographs to copy and use in the book.This received generous response and the material collected became the genesis for the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph (SEPP) collection now held in partnership between EDHS and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library). *Pioneers and Painters: One hundred years of Eltham and its Shire* was formally launched at the new Eltham Library, which itself was opened in August 1971, a southern extension to the Shire Offices.

Alan Marshall at the launch of
Pioneers and Painters - 1971
Photograph - SEPP Collection*

That was then…..

An official centenary dinner with Governor Sir Rohan Delacombe and his wife Joyce, Lady Delacombe in attendance was followed by a Buffet dinner held in the West Riding Hall, Henry Petrie Community Centre, Montmorency for invited guests including descendants of pioneer families.

A Centenary Parade took place in April down Main Road Eltham comprising floats from community groups and more, organised by the Chamber of Commerce.

Regular vintage steam train trips travelled from Montmorency to Hurstbridge and return. The train also stopped at Eltham, Diamond Creek and Wattle Glen stations on the afternoon of Sunday 18th April 1971.

Other activities included flower shows, exhibitions and demonstrations of arts and crafts, an evening jazz concert, bowls tournament, Easter Show, Christian fellowship rally, Renaissance Fair, vintage car display, performances by the Eltham Little Theatre, Youth Sunday Services, historical exhibition organised by the Historical Society at Shillinglaw Cottage, a craft exhibition and art show at Montsalvat. The Eltham Rural Group had a "viewing of old and new houses".

Vintage Steam Train Excursion - view of train and passengers at Montmorency Station, 18 April 1971

Photograph - SEPP Collection*

Commemorative medals were distributed to local school children and ratepayers. A commemorative postmark was also arranged.

Other events in 1971 included the publication of local histories: *Early Settlers of Arthurs Creek, Victoria*, by James Murphy and *Before you came, history of Diamond Creek* by Jock Ryan.

Eltham Village Shopping Mall constructed by H.M. Keast & Sons Master Builders opened late 1971.

The sisters of Charity re-located the Catholic Ladies' College from East Melbourne to its eight-hectare site in Diamond Street, Eltham.

Extensions and alterations, including the narthex, foyer and internal toilets commenced at Eltham Methodist Church (Present day Eltham Montmorency Uniting Church).

Extensions and alterations including "greying timber" also takes place at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church.

In November, flooding by the Yarra River and associated creeks impacted Lower Plenty and other parts of Melbourne including Rosanna Golf Club and the new south-eastern freeway.

Died in 1971: Ian Hassall, artist, teacher, open air gallery owner died aged 71.

* Do you have photos of the 1971 Eltham Shire Centenary Celebrations?

If you are happy to share, please contact us or email to: edhsoffice@gmail.com and we will arrange to copy these for our collection.

Local Road and Street Names

Russell Yeoman

From an article by Russell Yeoman - EDHS newsletter July 2010

The origin of road names is not always clear-cut. In Eltham, and generally in Victoria, the first roads were established as part of the survey and sale of Crown land and were known as Government roads. This was a description of a type of road rather than a name and usually they were not initially named.

The earliest roads in our area followed the boundaries of the mile square rectangular subdivision and because of the topography many contained extremely steep grades. They were not constructed as part of the early land sales.

In the 1850s the need for practical and legal access became apparent and the Government acquired roads through land that already had been sold and created new Government roads on more practical alignments. Later new records were acquired by the local authority, this creating a further category of road.

Names for these types of roads often came about by popular usage. Sometimes the name was formalised by Council declaration. In other cases the common name just came to be accepted as the official name.

As privately owned land was subdivided new streets were created, legally private streets but eventually becoming public roads. For many years plans of subdivision would show the names of new streets although many older subdivisions would simply identify them as "road". Often the names of subdivisional streets are selected by the subdivider, perhaps family names or descriptive names, such as Hillcrest Road. New names could be dictated by Council policy. For example, in the 1980s Eltham Council adopted a policy that new names should be of Aboriginal origin.

Main Road was the most identifiable road in the district and in its earliest days it was the main road through the area, but by common usage it is now known by the name Main Road. In road authority parlance it is also known as Eltham-Yarra Glen Road.

Main Road starts at the Plenty River, Lower Plenty, the western boundary of the former Shire of Eltham. It continues through Lower Plenty, Montmorency South, Eltham and Research to the boundary of Kangaroo Ground at Bells Hill Road. Beyond this point its name is Eltham-Yarra Glen Road. West of the Plenty River the main road is named Lower Plenty Road.

Main Road, Nearing Eltham
* Photograph - SEPP Collection

Main Road has its origin in a proclamation in 1840 under the Parish Roads Act of a road "between the" Suburban Allotments in the Parish of Jika Jika (North Fitzroy and the Village Reserve in the Parish of Nillumbik (Eltham). In many places the alignment of the road followed the dray track to Yarra Flats established by the Ryrie brothers more than ten years earlier.

From the Plenty River the road passed through the land that had been recently purchased by Benjamin Baxter. It followed the line of today's Main Road and Old Eltham Road and ended at today's Bolton Street. In 1869 the Eltham District Road Board opened a new road from Lower Plenty to Bolton Street bypassing Old Eltham Road. That is today's Main Road.

Local Road and Street Names

In 1850 there was a track along the Old Eltham Road route and it continued on towards Kangaroo Ground through the proposed Government township of Eltham and unsold crown land, roughly following the line of Main Road. Holloway's 1851 Little Eltham subdivision north of the township reserve made no provision for a through road although between Dalton Street and York Street, Maria Street generally followed the line of the track to Kangaroo Ground. Soon after the land was subdivided the Government established a road along the line of the track that involved acquisition of parts of Holloway's subdivision and creation of a Government road through the township reserve and northerly from Holloway's land. This completed the formal road link to Kangaroo Ground. Together with the new road of 1869 the whole length of today's Main Road came into being. However, it would be many years before the road proclaimed in the 1850s provided convenient all weather access.

This road or parts of it have been known by various names over the years. In particular, Maria Street through Little Eltham has an important historical context. A c1920 land sale plan from Lower Plenty shows it as Eltham Road. Further support for this name is provided by the Walter Withers painting "On the Eltham Road 1906".

However, a 1920s Council plan shows the full length from Lower Plenty to Research as Main Road so that appears to be the official name from at least that period.

On the Eltham Road 1906
Walter Withers

Main Road still follows the alignment set by its early history except for several minor deviations, notably between Dalton and Brougham Streets and at Colemans Corner just past Wattletree Road. Here its original alignment is now Coolabah Drive and Coleman Crescent. At Lower Plenty the old bridge over the Plenty River has been by-passed and now remains a distance to the south of the current alignment. Over much of its length the road reserve has been widened to accommodate dual carriageways by acquisition of private property. Dual carriageways have been constructed from Lower Plenty to Eltham South and through central Eltham.

The name of this road, although perhaps unimaginative is a functional name that indicates its obvious role.

Eltham Races

The Argus 15 December 1855

The inhabitants of Eltham seem determined of having races in their township this year, and the exertions they have made to secure this object are deserving of the success they have so far obtained. The money they have collected is not only sufficient to guarantee two "purses", but has enabled them to go to the expense of clearing a piece of ground admirably adapted for a racecourse, as it is nearly level and about three quarters of a mile in length. They have sanguine expectations, too, of getting up a "Diggers' Purse" and if they succeed in this there will probably be a second day's sport. Thursday, 20th inst., is the time fixed, as will be seen by reference to our advertising columns. A numerous attendance is expected, more especially as the beautiful scenery around Eltham will be a sufficient inducement of itself to many parties to attend. We have no hesitation in saying that in this alone all lovers of the picturesque will find ample compensation for their day's journey.

A 1863 halfpenny!   Calum Ryan

While walking home from the Eltham pub late one night in June 2019, I was showing my friends a slingshot I had recently purchased. I'd had a few drinks so I wasn't driving.

Walking past Mercers Restaurant in Main Rd beside the Old Eltham Courthouse I was looking for things to fire from my slingshot!

I had noticed the previous weekend that someone had done a spot of gardening between Mercers and the Courthouse.

Anyhow, getting to the story at hand, while walking along a disc shaped item caught my attention and as an Archeologist I was intrigued, so studied it further to find it was an 1863 halfpenny.

The Eltham Courthouse opened in 1860!

I would think over the years the garden where it was buried would have been turned over many times and there it was, just uncovered for me to find.

The monetary valve of the coin is zero as it is damaged beyond any dollar value, the sentimental value is also zero, however the archaeological and historical value has a little bit more significance. The stories that could be told by the coin, timelines, dates, defendants, prosecutors all passing through!

It could have even been owned by my three times Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother, who appeared at the Eltham Courthouse in 1883, over a small matter of stealing cows from my four times Great Grandfather!

The found halfpenny compared with an unburied original
Photograph - Calum Ryan

I think they were innocent? However the small talk around the dinner table would have been interesting! (see article on page 8 of the EDHS October 2021 newsletter)

Frederick Edward Falkiner (1820-1881)

Peter Pidgeon

Frederick Edward Falkiner was born in 1820 at Mount Prospect, Tipperary, Ireland, and in 1834 there was an emigration of several Falkiner family siblings, including Frederick, to Tasmania. In March 1835 he was appointed Postmaster at St Paul's Plains and shortly afterwards a Special Constable of Police in October 1835, where he was the Pound keeper in Campbell Town.

Frederick came to Port Phillip in October 1836, however newspaper advertisements suggest he returned to Tasmania at some stage and was running a general store in New Ross in 1838, then Lincoln in 1839, with his brother Daniel also operating a store in 1839 at Campbell Town. By 1841 Frederick was in Melbourne and operating as a horse dealer and keeper of the livery stables on the Eastern Hill. It was around July 1841 he married Fanny Gaile, second daughter of Dr. Gaile, of Gaile's Hill, County Carlow, Ireland.

Frederick Falkiner was appointed, effective June 1 1841, to fill the vacancy of Chief Constable of Police for Melbourne and Port Phillip with a salary of £100 sterling. It was observed in the *Port Phillip Gazette* (26 May 1841) that Falkiner's appointment was very judicious given the steadiness and circumspection of his character afforded by his several years' experience in Tasmania. His tenure was short though, as in January 1842 he resigned, or was dismissed, at which point he returned to his profession as a horse dealer in Melbourne, at least until 1847.

In September 1846, the former Chief Constable of Melbourne was apprehended on a charge of violently assaulting a jockey named John Watts, in the stables at the rear of the Royal Hotel. The assault, it appears, was in retaliation for a blow received at the racecourse earlier in the day, which produced a black eye. Falkiner was indicted on 17 October and the jury found him guilty of common assault and his honour sentenced him to pay a fine of one pound and to be discharged.

Sometime after 1847 Falkiner settled on land he had taken up at the junction of the Diamond Creek and Yarra River in the Parish of Nillumbik where he planted an orchard and grazed cattle. This leasehold included land reserved for a village and part of which later became Eltham Lower Park. There were several complaints against Falkiner in those early years. One memorable complaint was from seven men in the Nillumbik area on account of Falkiner's practice of impounding other men's cattle which strayed in the vicinity of the Falkiner occupation. Thomas Sweeney was the chief complainant.

Around the same time as Sweeney's complaint, Falkiner applied for three 640-acre leases (Lots 1-3) in the Parish of Nillumbik. In the early 1850s land on the east of the original Eltham Village reserve was subdivided into 22 lots and offered for sale at public auction in 1852, with one exception, being Allotment 17, on the south of Ely Street and containing nearly 2 ½ acres. On it were some improvements regarded as being the property of Frederick Edward Falkiner, which consisted of "1 ¼ acres of cultivations, a very dilapidated five-roomed hut of sawn slabs and a rough hut used as a dairy, total value £30." He was allowed to purchase Allotment 17 without having to compete at a public auction and was directed to vacate Allotment 18.

Falkiner Cottage, 1979, then situated at 19 Ely St., Eltham
Photograph - Alan Baker - EDHS collection

Frederick Edward Falkiner (1820-1881)

On February 1, 1854, the first Post Office in Eltham was opened, and the first postmaster was Frederick E. Falkiner, who presumably operated the service from his home. In today's mapping this was in Falkiner Street which runs between Main Road and Ely Street, Eltham. In that same year it is also recorded F.E. Falkiner complained about the Building Committee at the Little Eltham school, a complaint deemed "frivolous and vexatious" by Mr Goodman of Heidelberg.

On May 1, 1855, Falkiner was succeeded as Postmaster by Thomas Hunniford, a merchant of Little Eltham; the name of the post office remaining unchanged though it was listed in official returns by the name of the new location, the site of present day 820 Main Road.

In 1858 Falkiner was fined £5 and costs for carelessly setting fire to his stubble, yet in the same year he was an auditor for the accounts of the Eltham District Road Board, and the street adjacent to his crown grant was named after him.

In the early morning of July 1, 1881, Frederick E. Falkiner, one of the oldest inhabitants of the Eltham community, was found dead in his bed. When he had retired to rest a few hours earlier he was, apparently, in perfect health, and had been working the same day as usual on his farm. His death was attributed to heart disease.

Frederick's wife Fanny died seven years later on September 12, 1888, at Eltham and is buried at Eltham Cemetery though her grave site is not actually known. It is presumed to be located in the Old Methodist section adjacent or nearby to other Falkiner family members.

Frederick is also buried at Eltham Cemetery but the location of his grave is also unknown, presumably beside or with Fanny.

His death certificate reads as a little Who's Who of Little Eltham at the time. His death was registered by David George Clark, who was also the Head Teacher at the Eltham State School No. 209 in Dalton Street.

Falkiner family graves, Eltham Cemetery

Photograph - Peter Pidgeon - EDHS collection

He was buried on July 3 1881 by undertaker, William Bravery Andrew, who also owned and ran the General Store at the corner of Maria Street (Main Road) and Franklin Street (present day site of Cafe Zen Den). The minister who conducted the burial service was William Crozier, an early pioneer settler of Little Eltham and it was witnessed by George Knapman, the blacksmith who ran the shoeing forge adjacent to the Eltham Courthouse. All of whom are now resident in Eltham Cemetery.

Main sources: Peter Pidgeon has undertaken extensive research on Frederick Edward Falkiner and these resources are now part of our EDHS archives.

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

*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)

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