



No. 263 April 2022

## Proposed Demolition of The Eltham Courthouse

Jim Connor

This letter received 50 years ago put at risk the survival of the historic Eltham Courthouse. As you may imagine, in response Russell Yeoman Esq., Secretary of the then Shire of Eltham Historical Society, provided a very clear and definite message as to the significance of this building to our local history and to our community. Thankfully it survived and continued to operate as a Court of Petty Sessions until 1985. See the article on page 3 about the reopening of this recently restored Eltham Courthouse.



### Annual General Meeting

2.00pm **Saturday** 23rd April 2022

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre.

Library Place, Eltham

### Heritage Excursion

2.00pm **Saturday** 7th May 2022

Along the Aqueduct

See further details on page 2

## Heritage Excursion - Along The Aqueduct - Saturday 7th May 2022

The Maroondah Aqueduct was once a major link in Melbourne's water supply system. It was built between 1886 and 1891 to transfer water from the Watts River near Healesville to Preston Reservoir. It was 66 km in length made up of 41 km of open channel, 10 km of tunnels through hills and 15 km of pipeline across stream valleys known as inverted siphons.

The section of the aqueduct through Research and Eltham has been abandoned since the 1980s but the open channel has largely been retained. A recreational path follows the aqueduct reserve.

This walk on Saturday 7th May will start at 2pm where the aqueduct crosses Ingrams Road Research, near the corner of The Esplanade (Melway ref 12 G12). The intention is to walk along the aqueduct path as far as Parsons Road and return, a distance of about 4 km. This distance can be shortened on the day depending on the weather.

This free walk 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.



Maroondah Aqueduct at Research  
Photographer Tom Prior - \* EDHS

*From page 1067 Victoria Gazette No. 140 - March 26, 1957*

### **MUNICIPAL DISTRICT - ELTHAM**

#### **Dairies - Dairy Farms and House Trade Dairies**

##### *Present Holder of Licence; Location*

Bateson V. and R.: Kangaroo Ground - road, Wattle Glen.

Cathercole, H. : Panton Hill.

##### **Dairies - Milk Shops.**

Looker - road, Montmorency. (Harris and Dawson.)

Main Eltham - road, Lower Plenty. (Francis. J and J.)

Main - road, Eltham. (M. Bremner.)

Main - road, Eltham East. (R.F.Presswell.)

Main - road, Eltham. (W. S. and M. Buchan.)

Main - road, Eltham South. (M. L. Coker.)

Main road, Research. (J. F. and E. Knott.)

Mountain View and Sherbourne - roads, Montmorency. (G. R. de Pagny.)

"Blue Gum", Main - road, Eltham. (W. and M. Buchan.)

Railway Station Kiosk, Eltham. (R. J. Mann.)

Were - street, Montmorency. (A. W. and R. E. Lockwood.)

31 William - road, Briar Hill. (Mr. and Mrs. Watson.)

In the Conservation Management Plan prepared in 2006 for the Eltham Justice Precinct there is mention that more than 350 court houses have been built by the Public Works Department since 1856, when the Department was established.

It also states Eltham was in an early group of 'Victorian Free Classical' structures, featuring a projecting entry porch and gabled roof. Characteristically, this group shares a simple, rectangular shape, central placement of the court room with smaller-scale offices set back at the sides or rear of the court room, arched openings, and decorative string courses.

The Statement of Significance listed in the Victorian Heritage Register states:

*'The Eltham Court House dates from the time when the town was largely self-contained. It was initiated in response to itinerant gold prospectors who turned to crime when their quest was unsuccessful. This type of localised solution is characteristic of the self reliance preserved in Eltham today. The court house is an important symbol of the spirit which makes Eltham distinctive as a community.'*

It also states: *'The Eltham Court House, built in 1860, is one of only two intact examples in the state of this simple design with projecting entry.'*

So with this background it is most appropriate this valued historic building has recently been the subject of a total restoration, as detailed in previous newsletters. This was a major project undertaken by Nillumbik Shire Council.

At a small function in the Eltham Courthouse, on 23rd March 2022, Nillumbik Shire Council Mayor Fran Eyre declared the fully restored building officially reopened. In doing so the Mayor spoke about the earlier law and order function of the court and the importance of this building to the Eltham community.

Wingrove Ward Councillor Geoff Paine then highlighted the importance of historical societies and groups within the shire and their valued activities in recording and preserving their local history. EDHS president Jim Connor thanked everyone involved with the project and provided an overview of the history of the courthouse. Michael Ioannides, Council's project manager, spoke about how the restoration process proceeded and those involved in undertaking the works required.

Cr. Natalie Duffy, various council officers, EDHS executive committee members, as well as representatives of the head contractor Ducon Building Services and the heritage advisors, RBA architects and Conservation Consultants, were also in attendance, as was a representative of Nillumbik U3A.

After the formal part there was some light hearted interpretation of how past legal proceedings may, or may not have, occurred within this courthouse, before some refreshments were shared in the former second courthouse at the rear, which is now utilised by Nillumbik U3A.

This was a successful celebration of a very worthwhile project.



Jim Connor, Mayor Eyre, Crs. Duffy and Paine after reopening of the Courthouse

Mary (Sweeney) Murray and John Wright Murray selected 80 acres, in what we now know as Eltham North, under an occupation license in 1866. John died in 1867 and freehold was granted to his son John in 1873. The farm was known as 'Laurel Hill'. John Junior was an Eltham Shire councillor and sometime president from 1887 up until 1897. He added more land to the farm in c1888.

John and his younger brother James arranged to rent/purchase land across the Diamond Creek to the west, in c1900. It appears that John and James farmed separately for a few years. When John died in 1912 James took over the land on both sides of the Diamond Creek.

James Murray died in 1947 and the farm was taken over by his son James (Jim). Jim started to sell off parts of the farm in the 1980s, retaining a few acres around the c1910 homestead and building a new house there.

One remaining element of the original Murray's farm is the bridge over the Diamond Creek known as Murray's Bridge, which is now part of the Diamond Creek Trail. It is the only early bridge remaining on this shared trail extending from Eltham to Hurstbridge.

Nillumbik Shire Council had been considering replacing this bridge for some years and did approach our Society asking about the heritage significance of the structure. At our suggestion Council commissioned heritage consultant Dr. Peter Mills to undertake a Heritage Assessment. In his detailed report he commented 'The original bridge appears to have been a simplified version of the Country Roads Board's (CRB) standard timber bridge design of the early-to-mid 1920s. The CRB design was commonly used by local councils'.

At different stages since this bridge was constructed structural changes have been made, including in about 1990 when many parts were removed and some were replaced. Three recycled steel girders were also installed and later timber posts and handrails were replaced with steel posts and steel mesh railings.

In his report Dr. Mills commented that the condition of Murray's Bridge is poor, the integrity low and it is not easy to identify some of the original features of the design because of removal of parts and repositioning of others.

In his conclusion he said 'While Murray's Bridge has some local significance for a number of the significance criteria, it does not meet the threshold for significance for any of those criteria at the level which would be required for inclusion in the Nillumbik Shire Heritage Overlay'.

The bridge replacement works should be completed by late April 2022.

**Source:** Heritage Assessment by Dr. Peter Mills, July 2021. EDHS records.



Murray's Bridge - 3 February 2022  
Photograph - Jim Connor



Murray's Bridge during demolition - 28 February 2022  
Photograph - Nillumbik Shire Council

## Shire of Eltham

From Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shire\\_of\\_Eltham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shire_of_Eltham)

The **Shire of Eltham** was a local government area about 25 kilometres (16 miles) northeast of Melbourne, the state capital of Victoria, Australia. The shire covered an area of 277.13 square kilometres (107.0 sq. miles) and existed from 1856 until 1994.

### History

Eltham was first incorporated as a road district on 26 September 1856, and became a Shire on 6 April 1871. In 1878, it was altered and re-defined. In 1912, it lost some of its area to the Shire of Healesville.

In August 1918, Eltham Shire Council discussed and 'generally expressed themselves as favourable to the proposal' to obtain a "piece of land on the summit of Garden Hill, Kangaroo Ground, and the formation of a memorial park in which a monument could be erected to represent the whole of the Shire. It was opened on Armistice Day, 11 November 1926, by the governor-general, Lord John Baird Stonehaven. The site became known as Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Park.

On 18 June 1958, it lost 218 km<sup>2</sup> (84.2 sq. miles) of its East Riding to the Shire of Healesville. This area comprised Yarra Glen, Dixons Creek and parts of Christmas Hills. It also lost part of its North Riding, near Kinglake, to the Shire of Yea, on 1 October 1972.

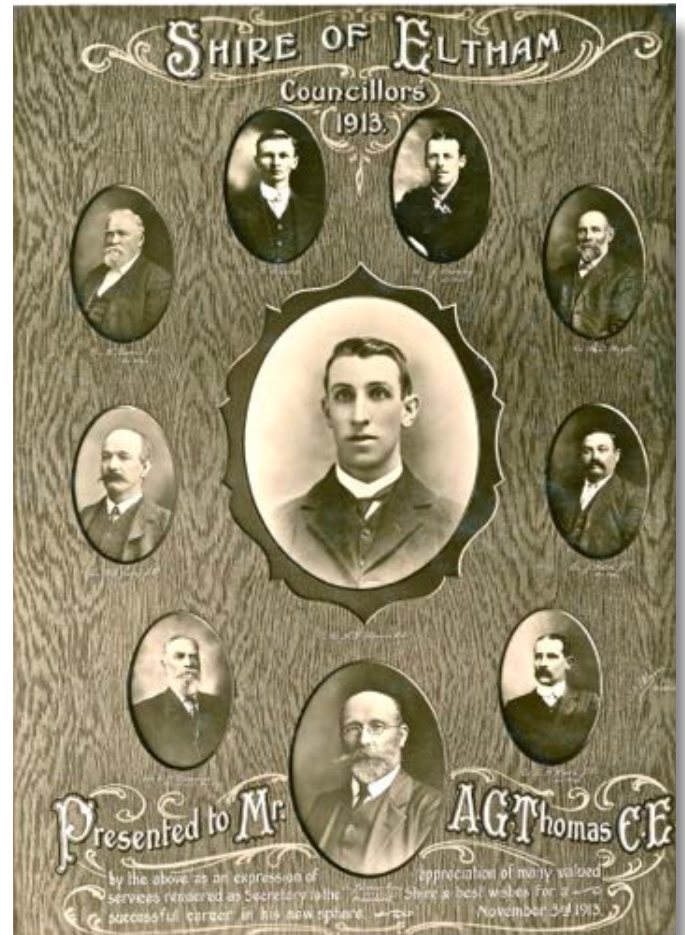
On 15 December 1994, the Shire of Eltham was abolished, and, along with parts of the Shire of Diamond Valley, was merged into the newly created Shire of Nillumbik.

The Kinglake district was transferred to the Shire of Murrindindi, while Montmorency and Lower Plenty, in the shire's far southwest, were transferred to the City of Banyule.

The Shire of Eltham was divided into three ridings on 16 March 1955, each of which elected three councillors:

- Central Riding
- North Riding
- West Riding

The population of the Shire in 1911 was 3,423, fifty years later in 1961 it was 16, 575 and eighty years later in 1991 it had significantly increased to 42, 670 people.



Shire of Eltham Councillors 1913  
Photograph - SEPP Collection \*

*Is it really worthy of a twenty-first celebration?*

Well, perhaps not really, though it is worth noting the portable lock up at the Eltham Justice Precinct, while not original to the site, has now been there for 21 years after being lifted into the yard area on 9 March 2001 by crane. It was transported by truck from Youth Road, Eltham, where it had been used as a storeroom for the previous 20 years, after earlier being at the Police Station in Pryor Street.

The term 'Lock Up' means it wasn't a jail, it was more for overnight retention of a person who may have found themselves in trouble with the police, possibly for being 'drunk and disorderly'.

It is a pre-fabricated structure, designed by the Public Works Department in Victoria, intended to provide jail facilities without the need to build a permanent lock-up. Each of the solid timber wall panels are individually numbered on the inside, to assist assembly after being transported to a location, probably using a horse and cart in the early days.

Essentially, the lock up is a cage: the walls, ceiling and floor are about 8 cm thick and concealed steel bars run vertically through the walls, as well as through the ceiling and floor. Anyone trying to cut their way out would have been in for somewhat of a surprise.

While the actual date of construction is unknown it is thought to be amongst a large group of portable lock ups, transported in kit form and categorised as 'Portable Lock Up - Timber' and also known as the "Casterton style", based on the only known plan for portable lock ups, built for the Casterton Police Station, in 1907.

Over the years the exterior of the building had deteriorated and in 2018 Nillumbik Shire Council arranged for it to be repaired and repainted, with some further work undertaken recently. As a result this refreshed lockup continues to add to the range of important historic buildings within the Eltham Justice Precinct.

You can be reassured it is not now used to lock up people, though it was popular during pre COVID tours of the Justice Precinct by pupils from local primary schools, especially if they were able to lock their teacher up (for a very short time) after a mock trial in the courthouse. The pupils themselves also seem to delight in the reality of being temporarily enclosed inside the lock up, which may be a change for them so often experiencing life via a small screen.



Lock Up prior to restoration  
Photograph - EDHS Collection



Lock Up after restoration - 2018  
Photograph - EDHS Collection

### Elizabeth Agatha (Betty) Erickson, nee Carrucan 1915-1990

Elizabeth Agatha (known as Betty) Carrucan, was born on December 28th 1915, in Eltham. She was the youngest of three children born to Mick and Mary Carrucan. Following Irish naming traditions, Betty was named after Elizabeth Agatha Sweeney, her mother's older sister.

She grew up on a mixed farm in Dalton Street with cattle, poultry and an orchard. As a girl, Betty had to look after the poultry. She looked upon this task with great distain and harboured a lasting dislike of chooks throughout her life.

She attended Eltham Elementary School where in 1931 she was presented The Rhodes Ideal Girls' Prize (previous recipients had been boys) for scholastic attainment but also those other qualities that go towards making desirable citizens such as efficiency in sport, bearing and character.

She subsequently won a scholarship to Melbourne Girls' High School and from there won another scholarship to attend Melbourne University. While at University, she taught her father to read and write. She studied each night under the light of a hurricane lamp in the back room of the Eltham farmhouse and encountered considerable opposition to her studies from the old Irish relatives who saw no place in a girl's life for a higher education.

As the depression set in during the thirties, she was forced to leave university for a year and work as the infant mistress at the Clifton Hill State School to help the family finances. She went back to university after a year and graduated in 1938 with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours degree. She has been reported to be the first Eltham girl to go to university.

She started work as a teacher and in the 1940s she worked in a number of Victorian country towns. While teaching at Stawell, she met a migrant Swedish miner, Gunnar Eric Erickson, and they married in 1946. She soon gave up teaching to start a family and followed Eric as he moved with the mining to Captains Flat near Canberra and on to the Snowy Mountains Scheme, then in its early years. Her two oldest children, Michael and Terence, were born in the primitive and tough conditions of these mining towns.

She returned to Eltham in 1950, and a third son was born. She then stayed on at the family farm at Dalton Street Eltham with her three young boys. Around this time her health started to deteriorate and bad circulation in her legs became a recurring problem. She spent most of one year in the Royal Melbourne Hospital and, at one stage, looked likely to lose both her legs. She would not give in and eventually got back on her feet, gathered her boys back as a family and went back to work.

In those days, married women were not allowed to teach but she was able to get a part-time teaching position at Eltham High School through the intervention of Harry Moody, the principal, who had taught with her in the country. Her legs were still very bad. One of the students in this photograph in the EDHS collection of her 1955 EHS Class, is Peter Brock, who would later become a successful motor racing driver.



1955 Eltham High School class with Betty Erickson  
Photograph - EDHS collection

## Elizabeth Agatha (Betty) Erickson, nee Carrucan 1915-1990 *(continued from page 7)*

In 1958 she took her boys to Queenstown in Tasmania where her husband Eric was working as an engineer with the Mt Lyell Copper Mines and she taught in the Queenstown School of Mines while there.

After a year, she returned to Eltham as her mother was very ill and the climate in Tasmania was too cold for her circulation. She taught at Heidelberg High School and stayed at Eltham until her mother died in 1961.

Her teaching continued until she retired in 1978 at age 62 to look after her brother Pat who was recovering from a very serious heart attack. She was still keen to contribute so worked for the next four years teaching HSC English in the night school at Coburg High School. She finally retired from teaching in 1982 after a career spanning 44 years.

Her later years were spent in Heidelberg, where she became involved in many community groups and helped those in need.

Betty was interested in her family history and arranged for the renewal of the Patrick Carrucan grave at the Eltham Cemetery in the late 1970s to replace the original, which had fallen into disrepair.

She died in 1990 from cancer. She is buried in the Eltham Cemetery near her husband who died in 1968 aged 58 and near her brother Jack and cousin Ken, who was like a brother when he was brought into the family after his mother died.

Betty was 74 years old.

**Source:** Dirt Poor Spirit Rich: commemorating the dispersion of members of the Carrucan family from West Clare, Ireland, 2011

### Our History - Our Library

The Eltham District Historical Society works closely with the Yarra Plenty Regional Library, particularly with the Eltham branch with presentations, displays and distribution of our newsletters.

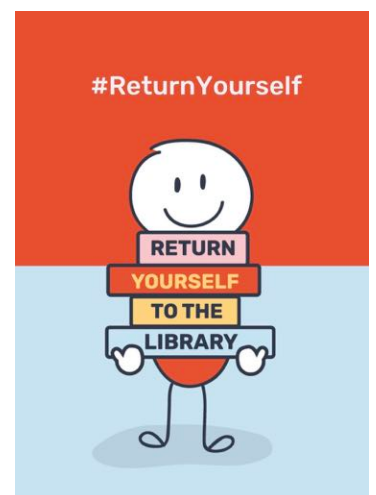
Following the reduction of COVID restrictions Yarra Plenty Regional Library is encouraging people to return to the library and reconnect with community, learn new skills or hobbies and dive into local and family history, with the wide variety of services and experiences available across their nine branches, mobile library, and Click & Collect hubs.

You can revive your family research or discover the history behind our local area with their engaging collection of books, DVDs, magazines, audiobooks, and more. The Eltham, Diamond Valley, Ivanhoe, and Mill Park branches offer access to informative local history collections. Beyond the collection, our local library also provides access to online resources including Ancestry, Find My Past, Gale Primary Sources and British Newspaper Archives, so you can explore your own history.

It is free to join and free to borrow, plus you get instant access to their entire collection from the moment you register. So, return yourself to the library and rediscover community, creativity, local and family history, and the collection. You can join now at [www.yprl.vic.gov.au](http://www.yprl.vic.gov.au).



Elizabeth Agatha (Betty) Erickson





## Annual General Meeting - 2.00pm, Saturday 23rd April 2022

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Eltham District Historical Society Incorporated will now be at **2.00pm on Saturday afternoon 23rd April 2022**, 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 2021 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 need to show they are double vaccinated. 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.

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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\*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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State Member for Eltham*