

# Newsletter

No. 264 June 2022



## Fifty Five Years Ago

On a foggy night in June 1967, fifty-five years ago, a large group of local people attended a meeting in Eltham that subsequently led to the establishment of the Shire of Eltham Historical Society.

Since then, many members have continued to encourage the preservation and recognition of the valuable historical records and memorabilia representing activities and events that have occurred in the Eltham area. Society meetings cover a wide range of subjects regarding our local history, as well as other matters of local interest, with involvement by a variety of speakers.



The society was originally established to cover what was then the Shire of Eltham and its early activities extended over the whole Shire from Lower Plenty to Kinglake. The establishment of other local historical societies, as well as municipal restructuring, have meant that the society's activities are now more confined to the Eltham district, which includes Eltham, Research, Kangaroo Ground, Montmorency, Briar Hill, and Lower Plenty. While this is reflected in the later change of name to the Eltham District Historical Society our collection of local records extends to cover the whole of the former Eltham Shire.

Over the years there has been significant interaction between the society and the council, initially Eltham and later Nillumbik. Involvements have included assisting with the publication in 1971 of the Shire's centenary history "Pioneers and Painters", researching and assisting with historical photos, consultations on historical matters and major input into local Heritage Studies.

During 1990 the Society assisted with the establishment of the Andrew Ross Museum at the former residence of the Kangaroo Ground School and following discussions with Nillumbik Shire Council in 1996-7 the Eltham Local History Centre was established in the former Eltham police residence at 728 Main Road, Eltham. We are fortunate this has been the home of the society for over 25 years. The recent restoration of the former Eltham Courthouse, by Nillumbik Shire Council, is another valued contribution to the Eltham Justice Precinct.

Society members have been involved in various community-based activities, presentations to schools and community groups, as well as organising many heritage walks around Eltham. The society newsletter is a long established and on-going feature, which includes news of activities together with articles of historical interest. As we celebrate our 55th anniversary we thank the many, many people who have contributed to the successful history of both of our societies.

*History never ends, our actions today become our history tomorrow*

### Next Society Meeting

2.00pm **Saturday** 11th June 2022

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre.

Library Place, Eltham

### Heritage Excursion

2.00pm **Saturday** 2nd July 2022

Eltham Lower Park

See further details on page 2

## Our Next Meeting - 2.00pm Saturday 11th June 2022

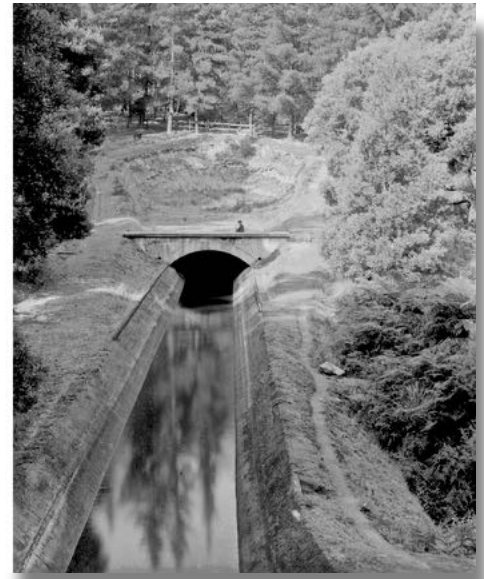
Following on from our last Heritage Excursion on 7th May when we investigated a section of the Maroondah Aqueduct, between Ingrams and Parsons roads in Research, our next meeting on Saturday 11th June 2022 at 2.00 pm, will further explore the whole Maroondah Aqueduct project.

As some of our members mentioned as we walked along the adjacent Aqueduct Trail, this significant historical link in Melbourne's water supply system is something we have taken for granted, or not even really noticed...it is just there!

Built between 1886 and 1891 to transfer water from the Watts River near Healesville to the reservoir at Preston this aqueduct was 66 km in length and included open channels, tunnels and the use of inverted siphons to keep water flowing, to eventually service Melbourne and suburbs.

At this meeting Jim Connor will talk about the challenges and achievements involved with this extraordinary project.

As always, Society members and visitors are most welcome to attend this meeting, at **2.00pm on Saturday 11th June** in the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre, Library Place, Eltham.



Echo tunnel - Maroondah Aqueduct c1940  
Photograph - State Library of Victoria

## Heritage Excursion - Saturday 2nd July - Eltham Lower Park - Walk and Talk

Eltham Lower Park has played an important part in the history of our area since the early days of European settlement when it was used by local residents as an informal racecourse. Prior to that its location at the junction of the Diamond Creek and the Yarra River made it an important meeting place for the Wurundjeri people.

The park combines formal elements and sporting facilities with remnant bushland that is of environmental significance. It is home to sporting and horse riding clubs, popular play spaces and the Diamond Valley Miniature Railway, which attracts large numbers of visitors. The park will be the venue for our July excursion which will comprise a walk of about 3.5 km around the park and adjacent areas. Along the way we will discuss the history and natural history of the area. The path along the creek and the river provides a pleasant and scenic walk.

This walk on Saturday 2nd July will take 2 to 2.5 hours. It will start at 2pm at the Main Road car park at the front of the park. (Melway ref 21 H 10). 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.

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Diamond Valley Local  
Thursday April 1955



## Those Wild Aqueduct Days

Melbourne's incredible thirst for water has had considerable impact on the local scene.

In 1855 the Plenty River was reduced to a trickle by the construction of the Yan Yean Reservoir while in 1891, the Watt's River at Healesville lost most of its water to the Maroondah Aqueduct. Closer to home much of Christmas Hills was inundated in 1982 beneath the waters of the Sugarloaf Reservoir.

The construction of the Maroondah Aqueduct between 1855 and 1891 saw the districts of Christmas Hills, Kangaroo Ground, Research and Eltham transformed by scenes reminiscent of their former turbulent days of gold.

There were grog shanties and navy camps scattered throughout its length, and local courts busy with cases involving petty pilfering and boisterous behaviour.

Built entirely by horse and manpower the 68 kilometre Maroondah Aqueduct was an engineering masterpiece designed to gravity feed 112 million litres of water a day to Melbourne along a gradient of just one foot to the mile.

In the hill country it passed through numerous tunnels up to three kilometres on length, and beneath every creek along inverted syphons. Construction was principally by small contractors with stone-braking contracted out by the lineal foot, brick-making by the thousand, haulage by the ton and fencing by the rod.

No metrics system then!

At Kangaroo Ground, the school enrolment jumped to 91 pupils, all crammed into a single classroom under a single teacher.

Here's a description of the larger of the Christmas Hills camps as it appeared in the papers in May 1890:

*"The camp covers about ten acres of the sloping ground occupying it indiscriminately. Here a series of sheds, stables and drivers quarters where a few weatherboard huts house the bosses, the contractors, the engineers and the inspectors, the clerks and the storekeepers. Yonder some long tents with sheds and outhouses built up of old bagging, bark and staves of cement casks. One or two boarding houses, having sheds in some shaded places where dozens of men may get their meals. Dotted here and there with no order, method or plan, a hundred of the simplest canvas homes. The village has been occupied from eighteen months to two years."*

Source: From a Journey in Time – a column about Nillumbik's history - Diamond Valley News, November 29, 2000 by **Mick Woiod**, Andrew Ross Museum Kangaroo Ground



Water: Maroondah Aqueduct through Christmas Hills in 1929 - Photograph Diamond Vally News



Aqueduct Workers - Photograph - Internet source



In March 2022 the Eltham District Historical Society (EDHS) received in the mail a small, very old handmade book containing a collection of poetry, written by a Gwendoline Davies. This book had been generously posted to EDHS by a person who discovered it in an opportunity shop in Bega, New South Wales. As there were no details to help identify who Gwendoline Davies was, other than a reference to Eltham in the papers, it did set us a challenge to see what we could find out about her, let alone why her writings were found in Bega.

In entirely unrelated circumstances Joan Castledine, one of our committee members, mentioned she had an antique combined inkwell/pen rest she would like to donate to EDHS, as it may be of use to display in our replica police station or in the recently restored former Eltham Courthouse. Joan said this had been given to her by a local Jones family who lived in Eltham and she would like to see it in community use.

However, on hearing about this book Joan had an *'I wonder'* moment, as to whether the poet Gwendoline Davies, could be Gwendoline Jones, wife of Frederick Jones. Fred had a long association with the Eltham Cemetery Trust, first becoming a Trustee in 1944. He was known as a caring gentleman who effectively contributed his consummate business skills to his Trustee role, for over 50 years. In recognition of his contributions there is a garden area within the cemetery named after him. At times Gwen was also involved by handwriting Trust records to replace those lost in an earlier fire.

Fred's father had been a grave digger there and Fred and Gwen are buried in the cemetery, as are their two children, as well as Fred's parents. Fred was involved with various cemetery activities and even though he was a non-drinker (but he did like a whisky each night before dinner!), he was known to sometimes venture into the Eltham Hotel to gather men to help when a grave had to be dug by hand.

It is understood Gwen was an only child and that Davies Drive in Eltham is named after her family. Gwen and Fred first lived in Arthur Street, near Main Road, then in Bible Street, Eltham. Joan said Fred treated Gwen like a Princess and would never have a bad word said against her, he really loved and respected her. Their son Geoffrey, who died in 1979, had been actively involved with local community groups, including the Apex Club of Eltham and the CFA.

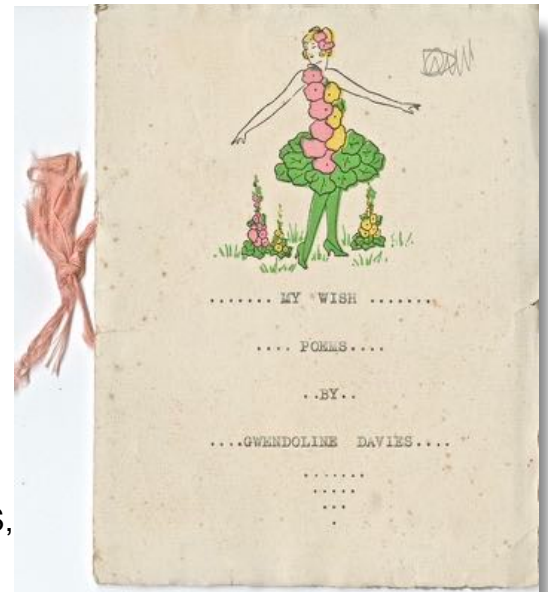
So, the mystery of a little book of poetry posted to EDHS led to the discovery of a story linked to another chapter of our local Eltham history, all unlocked by the idea of a donated inkwell, ..... though we are still to find out how this little book of memories made its way to Bega.

**Sources:** Joan Castledine, EDHS member

Rita Woolley and Fred Harrington OAM from the Eltham Cemetery Trust

More details about this story and the Jones family are in our ThrowbackThursday feature on FaceBook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/elthamhistory/>



Poetry Book by Gwendoline Davies  
Photograph - Peter Pidgeon



Donated antique inkwell  
Photograph - Jim Connor

## Eltham Progressing - 1925

Eltham is now undergoing the experience of a building boom, and many visitors are asking, in a semi humorous spirit, "What is the matter with Eltham that so many new buildings are being erected?" First of all in size and importance is Mr H. Watson's new hotel, which has been placed on the site of the old one, which was built some 80 years ago. It is of pleasing exterior design, and when completed will be a decided ornament and acquisition to the town. It is two storey and roofed with tiles. We hope shortly to be able to give a detailed description of the hotel, and a sketch of its interesting history.



Watson's Original Eltham Hotel  
Photograph - J H Clark - SEPP Collection \*

Miss Hannaford is having constructed, beside the present post office a new brick building, which will be used as a store and post office. Its dimensions will be 21 feet by 23 feet, and it will have a front that will be no discredit to the main street. The building at the rear will be renovated and have a new roof provided for it. The old place next to the new one, was built in 1868-57 years ago. Mr G. Hood, of Preston is the contractor. Mr Hood has just built a fine new residence to the order of Miss Taylor and Mr P. Williams, directly across the street from the post office. It is of weather-board, of handsome bungalow design, and contains five rooms and nearly all the conveniences that are demanded by the necessities and fashion of the present time, including fittings for electric lighting. It stands on a fairly steep slope, which ensures complete drainage. The view of hill and valley to the westward is very pleasing.

Mr C.R. Nicholls is about to have erected at the corner formed by the junction of Main Street and York Street a fine new store. Mr J. H. Fraser, of Eltham, is the contractor, and has dug the trenches for the foundations. The structure, which will be of brick, will be 33 feet by 18 feet, and will be completely and conveniently fitted with all the requirements of an up-to-date store. The front will be a handsome one of plate glass. Alongside the store, on the main street, a large and tastefully designed residence, for which also Mr Fraser is the contractor, will be erected for Mr Nicholls.

Mr C. Fisher, baker, who will occupy Mr Nicholls' present store when he vacates it (as the property is his), has had built by Mr Fraser a commodious and well-appointed bakehouse 18 feet by 18 feet. Mr J. E. Young, the new holder of "Andrew's Store," has had some important improvements made in the building, both in the exterior and interior. A want, which has long existed in Eltham, is the cafe opened by Mr A. Copeland in the main street, near the railway station. It is conducted in a large and substantial brick building which was built a few years ago as a store. Visitors are patronising it well, and Mr and Mrs Copeland are not likely to regret their enterprise. On Saturday afternoon last over 100 visitors filled it, and there was ample room for all.

The evidences of progress which we have enumerated are but an earnest of the time when Eltham - now one of Victoria's show places - will be a favourite resort for many thousands of people who feel the need of a change from a crowded city to the delightful scenes and open spaces which this part of the State offers.

Source: Eltham Progressing. (1925, November 13). *Advertiser (Hurstbridge, Vic. : 1922 - 1939)*, p. 2  
<https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/56659043>

As a historical society with an expanding internet presence we sometimes receive unusual requests or enquiries. Our website or Facebook pages can easily be accessed with a few computer clicks and sometimes the searcher doesn't fully check or know where they are heading.

In recent times we have been regularly contacted by an international company that claims it is a world-leading services marketplace with over 5 million customers in 8 countries around the world. They state they are passionate about helping people find what they need and helping the businesses that provide these services succeed.

So you may wonder why they would contact EDHS searching for a cake maker for Elvis, who was looking for a Super Mario themed cake, maybe having Mario and Luigi on it. They would also prefer a speech bubble connected to Mario with it saying HAPPY BIRTHDAY.



Then another contact was for a chocolate cake for approximately 20 people to celebrate Holy Communion for three children, two girls and a boy.

The same company is interested in obtaining a local caterer for a lunch for less than 10 people, another for a breakfast/brunch for up to 49 guests, and yet another for a birthday party for 20 plus, being a BBQ or hot buffet and also one for someone wanting a 'premium service' BBQ birthday party for up to 19 people.

There have been various requests from the same place for photography services for events, head shots, debutante shots (outside), a christening, real estate profiles, for a 21st party and even someone wanting photos of their tattoos!

In addition there is a need for a gardener for a small one time residential project, though they don't need plants, but do want garden waste removed. Oh, let's not forget the request for a scaffolder to install scaffolding for plumbers to work on second storey guttering and down pipes.

A very different enquiry was from a student studying for a Masters in Museum Studies, whose research paper is about Victorian Historical Societies and we were asked questions such as :

- What are the biggest concerns for Victorian Historical Societies?
- What is the future for your Historical Society?
- How will your museum continue in 20-30 years time? etc.

We responded with some detailed information, which apparently was appreciated.

A recent approach was from a film location manager looking to find a couple of key locations for a new Australian TV series to be produced for Disney+. We did make a suggestion.

As there is more than one Eltham in the world we do occasionally receive requests relating to places we cannot easily recognise. Sometimes it takes a while to realise the enquirer is seeking information about Eltham near London in the United Kingdom, or it may be somewhere near Eltham in New Zealand, or even Eltham in New South Wales. At such times we provide a redirection service.

These are in addition to the regular requests for information about matters relating to local history of our Eltham district, which after a little research we can often answer. Sometimes if such approaches yield details we do not already have then these can be added to our own records.

So, while you may naturally think our society just deals in matters of historical significance, as you can see we need to be versatile and respond to what ever comes our way,.... from where ever !



Recently, a friend told me that in about 1950 a girl drowned in the aqueduct at Research. Fortunately, it transpires that the account was exaggerated.

It was at Research in August 1951. On the way home from school, seven-year-old Jacqueline Duncan and 11-year-old Lynette d'Herville were playing on the bank of the aqueduct, which was 15 feet wide with water 7 feet deep, flowing rapidly. Jacqueline lost her shoe and fell in trying to retrieve it. Lynette couldn't swim, but nevertheless jumped in to help her. The girls were swept along for 300 yards through a tunnel and became separated. However Lynette clung to a pipe on the wall of the aqueduct and managed to grab Jacqueline's dress as she floated by unconscious. She supported Jacqueline until a man pulled them both out.

In a ceremony at Government House 18 months later, the Governor Sir Dallas Brooks presented Lynette with the Rupert Wilks Trophy for the year's "most outstanding case of bravery by a child under 13"; she also received the Royal Humane Society's Bronze Medal. After the investiture, the Governor said "I am all for the young living adventurously, but I am also for an umbrella of security being kept quietly over them."

There were drownings, though. In 1924, a 59-year-old man Robert Burns Cleary was found dead "in Rooks dam on the aqueduct, between Research and Diamond Creek". This is probably referring to the pondage near Allendale Rd where the aqueduct enters a siphon. A verdict of drowning was returned; there was no evidence to indicate how he came to be in the water. And in 1894, a girl or young woman called Ann Hawkins drowned in the aqueduct at Diamond Creek. She had been on her way to a neighbour's house, where she had been employed to do light work. When she failed to turn up for work one day, it was feared that she may have fallen into the aqueduct, which she had to cross to get to the neighbour's, and this was confirmed by the discovery of her body some time later.

Further downstream, in 1930 six-year-old Alice Beatrice Charteris (name given as Annie in one account) drowned in the aqueduct at Reservoir. She had been wandering alongside the aqueduct in the company of her nine-year-old brother Alan to pick wildflowers. At one spot, they climbed through a wire fence and hung over the water by holding on to the telephone wires under a bridge. Alan said that he held Alice so she would not fall in, but when he saw a magpie in the paddock he went looking for its nest. Alice was not there when he returned to the aqueduct and so he went home to inform his parents. Members of the family and neighbours followed the course of the aqueduct for three-quarters of a mile to a junction basin, where they found Alice lying on an iron grating. Resuscitation methods were applied for three hours, but without success.

In 1931 a three-year-old boy drowned at Whittlesea in the aqueduct which feeds into Yan Yean Reservoir.

(Main sources: The Herald 17/2/1953, The Argus 18/2/1953, Hurstbridge Advertiser 12/9/1924, The Age 3/12/1894, The Herald 20/10/1930.)



Lynette d'Herville receiving two awards for bravery from the Governor, Sir Dallas Brooks, at Government House today  
Photograph - The Herald 17 Feb. 1953

In 1993 work by the Shire of Eltham Parks and Environment staff and volunteers resulted in the preparation of a Register of Significant Trees listing forty-one trees or groups of trees. According to the Shire of Eltham Historical Society (Newsletter No. 91, March 1993), a similar number remained to be assessed for inclusion in the register. There is a wide range of indigenous and planted trees on private and public land extending throughout the then former Shire of Eltham area from Lower Plenty to Kinglake. Most can be viewed from publicly accessible locations.

The Register of Significant Trees listed 41 trees or groups of trees. It contains a wide range of naturally occurring and planted trees. They have been assessed according to eleven criteria including size, age, rarity, historical value and the like. The list includes large old Red Gums at Lower Plenty, historic Oaks at Kangaroo Ground and Mountain Ash at Kinglake.

The register includes a set of images showing each tree. Garry Bartlett of the Council's Parks and Environment Section and Faye Shepherd were extensively involved in establishment of the register (Newsletter No. 93, November 1993).

In 1999 Nillumbik Shire Council planners prepared an amendment to the Planning Scheme to provide protection for approximately 200 of the places listed in the heritage studies and also in the Register of Significant Trees commenced by the Eltham Shire Council (EDHS Newsletter No. 127, July 1999).

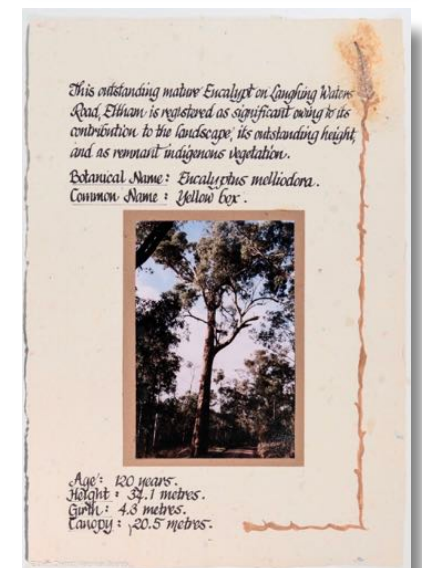
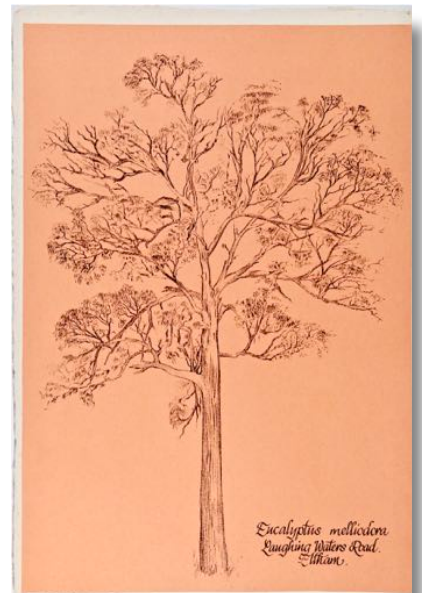
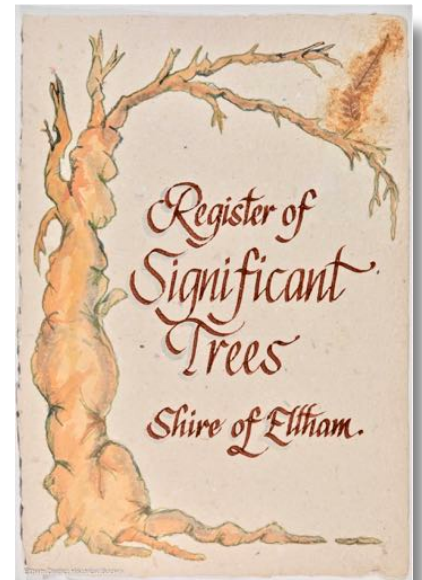
In 2004, The Register of Significant Trees was presented to the Eltham District Historical Society by Nillumbik Shire Council as part of a wider collection of its memorabilia of the former Eltham Shire Council (EDHS Newsletter No. 159, July 2004).

The album contains 11 illustrated pages of loose handmade paper sheets within a handmade slipcover constructed of handcrafted card with encapsulated flora material (flowers, vines, ferns) and tinted. Over time some of this material has deteriorated and the overall register is fragile and therefore not able to be displayed publicly.

As far as our society knows there is now no formal register of significant trees for Nillumbik Shire. Since the inception of the Heritage overlays trees worthy of individual protection have been covered by this overlay. Trees included in the heritage study were initially included and others would have been added from time to time.

Since this register was established there has been significant tree loss, either through removal or dying. Unless there are major tree plantings by Federal, State and local governments the environment enjoyed by past generations will not be there for future generations.

More details about the Register of Significant Trees, including specific trees, are available at <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5be242c221ea6a14986b0fd8>



Pages from the Shire of Eltham Register of Significant Trees



### Memorial to Stillborn Babies

A memorial to stillborn babies lies under the trees on the western side of the Eltham Cemetery.

A plaque within a garden bed states:

“Cherished, but not cradled. This small garden is adjacent to a communal gravesite for stillborn babies, or those who died soon after birth. They were all born and/or died at Queen Victoria Medical Centre and buried between March 1979 and April 1986.”

The landscaping was funded by Stillborn and Neonatal death Support (SANDS) Vic. members. It also initially had a low wooden seat in place.



The Queen Victoria Medical Centre itself was founded in 1896 and at the time was one of only three hospitals worldwide founded, managed and staffed by women. The Centre has since merged and amalgamated with the Monash Medical Centre.

### Annual General Meeting - Saturday 23rd April 2022

The Annual General Meeting for the Eltham District Historical Society was held on Saturday 23rd April 2022. This was a historical meeting as it was the first time EDHS has held a meeting on a Saturday. The result of the elections at this meeting are as follows:

President	Jim Connor
Senior Vice President	Peter Pidgeon
Junior Vice President	Liz Pidgeon
Society Secretary	Russell Yeoman
Treasurer/Membership Secretary	Robert Marshall
Ordinary Committee Members:	Joan Castledine, Alison Delaney, Andrew Lemon OAM, Irene Kearsey
Membership Sub-Committee:	Rosemary Aitken, John Fecondo, Peter Thomson.

We welcome our 2022/23 committee members and thank our retiring committee members Tony Brocksopp and Richard Pinn for their contributions over many years to the organisation and operation of our society.

### Subscriptions

At this Annual General Meeting subscriptions for 2022/23 were fixed at the same levels as last year and are as follows:

Single member \$25.00 - Family \$30.00 - Business organisation \$30.00

The convenient three year subscription option is three times the annual fee.

**Subscriptions are due on 1 July but earlier payment is welcomed.**

Our treasurer, Robert Marshall can receive payment either at the June meeting, by direct debit to **Eltham District Historical Society Inc, Bendigo Bank BSB 633 000 Account 141 820 902** .....when making an EFT please remember to include your surname or by post to EDHS, 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095.



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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State Member for Eltham**

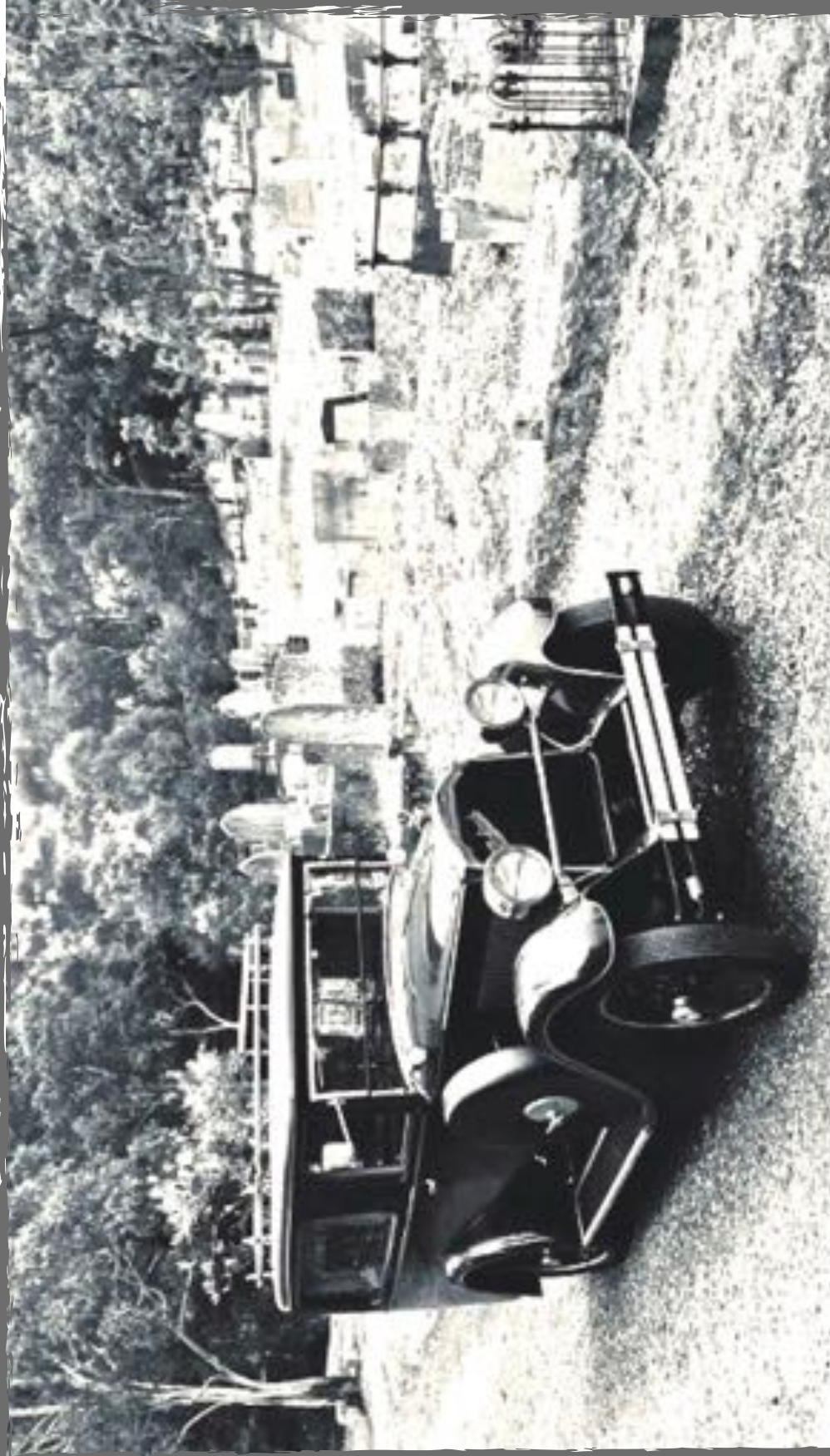
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- **Robert Marshall, Treasurer / Membership Secretary**  
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Our postal address is 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095

We are always interested to consider local history stories or articles for publication in our newsletter





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