



You Are History

Jim Connor

Yes you are, you may not think so, but you are. History is not always 'way back when', it can be yesterday, today or tomorrow and you are part of it.

We all have our own history, we all share or are part of the history of family, of place, of groups, of lifestyles etc. Recording of such history is important and the methods used have changed over the years and continues to evolve.

At our last EDHS meeting we were able to enjoy exploring a selection of photographs of early Eltham taken by John Henry Clark. If he had not lived here and recorded these images our local history would not be as rich. His quality snapshots allow us an insight into those earlier times. When he was setting up his large camera, on top of a heavy tripod, was he thinking he was capturing our history, for the appreciation of future generations, or was he just 'taking a photograph' of something, or someone who appealed to him. We are fortunate to have his valuable images, yet disappointingly don't have a photograph of the man himself.



Police Station Eltham taken by J.H.Clark
(can you see his shadow?)
Photograph - EDHS Collection

Without both professional and amateur chroniclers, including articles in newspapers of the day, we would have a lot less background information about local events and activities that have occurred over the years. Today, resources such as TROVE are invaluable for researching what was recorded in earlier days.

When we fast forward to now we all have various opportunities to document and record our own personal, as well as our local history. Most of us carry a mobile phone with a camera and many use various social media options. Articles in our newsletter are also an effective way to capture memories and stories of our past, as well as more recent history. As any of these newsletters are available on our website (www.elthamhistory.org.au), which also contains much historical information, anyone, anywhere in the world can now access and explore our history. We are always pleased for you to share your local history with us.

Our actions today do become our history tomorrow

Next Society Meeting

7.30pm **Wednesday** 12th October 2022

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre.

Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion

2.00pm **Saturday** 5th November 2022

Montmorency Bushland Reserves

See further details on page 2

Our Next Meeting - 7.30 pm Wednesday 12th October 2022



It is 150 years since the Colony of Victoria introduced the Education Act in 1872. At our next society meeting at 7.30pm on Wednesday 12th October we will look at the early history of some of the schools in the Eltham district.

What were the driving forces behind the establishment of some of these schools and what challenges were encountered along the way?

At this meeting Dr Geoffrey Sandy will speak about the Church of England Denominational School at Little Eltham, Dr Andrew Lemon will talk about the history of Research State School, Jim Connor will speak about the Eltham Primary School and Irene Kearsey will comment on some of the findings from her recent project digitising the early class records of Eltham Primary School.

Please note this is our first evening meeting this year following on from our recent meetings on Saturday afternoons. This will be held at our usual venue, the Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre, Library Place, Eltham.



Research State School No.2959 - c.1922
Photograph from the Reynolds/Prior Collection held by EDHS

October is Local History Month at the Yarra Plenty Regional Library

Heritage Excursion - Montmorency Bushland Reserves Saturday 5th November 2022

Scattered throughout the eastern part of Montmorency are several small open space reserves that have been grouped together under the title of Montmorency Bushland Reserves.

Most were created in the 1920s Panorama Heights subdivision, but some result from later subdivisions or Council purchases. They contain remnant bushland of varying quality. Some contain made paths and others have informal tracks.

We plan to link these reserves by a walk around Montmorency streets with historical comments along the way. This walk on Saturday 5th

November will start at 2pm at Rattray Reserve 127 Rattray Road Montmorency. (Melway ref 21E6). The distance is about 3 km and it will take about 2 to 2.5 hours. 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 021063.



The post second world war period in the Eltham area was a time when some people were looking to expand their horizons, develop connections and share experiences. Included were those wanting to build somewhere to live or wanting to build somewhere for others to live.

Montsalvat then was a seeding ground for many working or volunteering there, whilst learning new skills using basic or recycled materials, especially due to post war shortages of materials. It was a time when creative constructors such as Alistair Knox, Peter Glass, Sonia Skipper, Clifton Pugh, Ellis Stones, Gordon Ford and many others were emerging. They experienced changes in their life-styles, attitudes and approaches to what there was pre-war. Many new arrivals to our shores also became actively involved, including in the emerging building industry.

When later writing about those times Alistair Knox said “Eltham attracted a disproportionate number of Dutch migrants, partly because they were drawn to the hilly landscape which made it so different to the flat country they had left.”

“They proved to be people of real quality, combining special skills and national traditions that have given a lead to our district ever since. One has only to recall names like Herman and Martin Sibbel, Bill Van der Voorden, Peter Hellemons and the Deylen family to realise how their coming enhanced our building and other abilities. They often succeeded better than we did, and also became true Australians in the best sense of the word.”

Knox employed the Sibbel brothers as foremen who did the carpentry work when building an extension to the Downing Le Gallienne house in Yarra Braes Road, Eltham South, that he originally constructed in 1949.

Herman and Martin came from a family of fine craftsmen in carpentry in Amsterdam since 1885. They soon branched out and in 1955 established Sibbel Builders in Eltham. Both worked long hours to become very successful building designers and contractors, well known for the quality of their designs and workmanship in the 300-400 homes they constructed in Eltham, Doncaster, Templestowe and in other areas across Melbourne.



Looking south from Swan Street, Eltham, c.1965
Sibbel Builders factory is in the foreground
Photograph - Russell Yeoman

They were ahead of their time with the design and use of prefabricated frames. At their factory in Susan Street, Eltham they built the kitchens, wardrobes, window frames and custom-built furniture for their houses. Herman was considered an incredible designer with a keen eye and an attention to detail. Their houses have generally aged well and are still popular with both owners and purchasers, who appreciate the build quality and open plan benefits of Sibbel Mid-Century Modern designs.

At times there was some similarity in houses built during this period by Sibbel Builders, Alistair Knox and some designed and built by Graeme Gunn at Merchant Builders. Shared influences and features included the use of white panel ceilings, stained timber beams, window walls, exposed internal brickwork, timber joinery and use of other natural materials throughout.

Sibbel Builders – A Rich History

(continued from page 3)

In the family tradition Meyer Sibbel started working with his father Herman, then in 1968 took over Sibbel Builders. Herman continued to design and work closely with Meyer. During the early 1970's when the building business was booming, Sibbel Builders won the Housing Industry Award five years in a row. In an article in the Herald newspaper in 1969 an award-winning Sibbel home in Lower Templestowe was described as 'a good example of the warmth and friendliness that natural materials can create in a family home'.

In the Victorian Heritage Database some Sibbel houses in Lower Templestowe are described as:

“The Sibbel Builders houses at 68-70 Olympus Drive, Lower Templestowe are of local historic and aesthetic significance to Manningham City.

The Sibbel Builders houses are of historic significance as representative examples of the houses constructed by Sibbel Builders, one of a number of major residential development companies who were responsible for innovative residential development in the study area during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Sibbel Builders houses are of aesthetic significance as fine and intact representative examples of post-war contemporary houses, which exhibit the characteristics that are typical of the firm's style. They are also important contributory elements within the Olympus Drive precinct, which includes a number of other houses in similar style by Sibbel and by their rivals, Merchant Builders.”

Meyer Sibbel's daughters Wilhelmina and Fleur continue the family tradition with a successful furniture design and manufacturing business named Zuster, meaning 'Sister' in Dutch. The furniture business started in 1994, called Sibbel Furniture, then later changed to Zuster in 2000. They initially worked alongside their father, in his cabinet making factory in Research, and have built the furniture business together.

Our society appreciates having recently received from the Sibbel family copies of photographs, brochures and other information about Sibbel Builders and their families, which have been added to our local history resources.

Sources:

Information and photographs from the Sibbel family

The Herald, Monday August 25 1969 – page 21

Alistair Knox - “Golden Moments in Our Memory” - <https://alistairknox.org/books/31>

Victorian Heritage Database - vhd.heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/



Sibbel houses c1970s

Photographs - Sibbel Family

Reminiscences of 1930s Eltham

Extracts from letters sent by Edith Jones (nee McLean) to Harry Gilham, EDHS president, during the period September 1998 to January 1999.

20 September 1998

My name is Edith and I turned five years old on 20th December 1929. I was the second of five girls born to Hector and Louisa McLean during the Depression years. Two more girls arrived later, Gwladys and Phoebe.

We had moved to Eltham and lived in the fourteen-roomed old delicensed hotel, right opposite the present hotel. My widowed Aunt and our four cousins shared with us for a while and then found a little house of their own in Abbotsford and left us.



William Morris's Evelyn Hotel, Eltham c.1911.
Photograph - EDHS Collection

I started school at Eltham and Miss Finnin was the Head Mistress. I loved her and I loved school. We were let out early on the day of the fire – just to see the fire! Great excitement!

I remember walking down Dalton Street with other children, up past the two Misses Grant's little cottage nestled in the valley there, and up past Collis's grocery shop (or was it Burgoyne's?) Then, as we came closer to the smoke and smell, we screamed when we saw it was OUR house! OUR HOUSE!

We ran, screaming and crying and calling, "Mummy! Mummy!" and were met by a tearful bundle of Mum with her babies around her, pale and trembling and unable to speak. We stood, crying, and watching as thick black smoke poured out of our home, flames leaking out of the windows and that awful crashing sound as the building collapsed, exhausted. It was a nightmare come true. Lots of other people were watching, too. That's all they could do – watch. There as no Eltham Fire Brigade – no available water. I remember an old fire cart arriving from Research too late – it had like a water tank on the back of a lorry.

I can still vaguely remember the house, but not all the details of its construction. It had great big rooms with high ceilings and a very big kitchen and enclosed back verandah porch. Also it had a lovely shiny-floored ballroom in the centre section. We weren't allowed in there much, but Mum always put the baby, Phoebe, in there to sleep in the afternoons. It was cool and quiet in there, and the pram wheeled in easily.

On this tragic day, the baby wouldn't settle down, so Mum took her, in the pram, down to the back shed where Dad was working on something and needed her help. I don't know where my other two sisters were, Isabel and Gwen, probably playing around in the sawdust at Dad's feet. They were never far away from him and his tools.

The way the "shed" was situated was one of the problems. I think there were two big sheds, long and deep, and facing out to Pitt Street. You couldn't see the house if you were working inside. I believe they were coach houses or stables when the house was originally a hotel. Anyway, that's what we were told.

My mother always took the blame for the fire. When she finished cooking, she always cleaned out the ashes from the wood stove and carried them out in the metal ash pan to bury them in a hole in the back yard, for safety's sake. Dad used to tell her to put them in a tin bucket first, but she did it her way. She told us she must have spilled a bit of hot ash as she came across the back verandah, or else the breeze may have caught some sparks as she opened the back door, and they must have gone down through the cracks in the floorboards and smouldered on papers and rubbish in the cellar. (I used to like sneaking down into the cellar as apples were kept there and it was spooky!)

The fire must have taken a while to take hold, because Dad told us that he had said to Mum a few times: "Smell that smoke, Lou, there's bushfires around today!" Then, when he looked out towards Pitt Street and saw thick smoke he said, "They're pretty b-close!" and dropped his tools and dashed out to see the house enveloped in flames. Of course, it was weatherboard, tinder dry and on a very hot summer's day. What hope was there of saving it? No "laid-on" water, no garden hoses then. Dad tried to rush in, heroically, and save something, but got quite burned. He dragged out Mum's old chest of drawers, which stayed with us until 1972. Dad was nearly twenty years older than Mum, and tough.

I can still recall the shock and horror and all of us crying madly and clinging to Mum. Poor Mum! Jean was seven years old, then, and after that she took ill with St Vitus's dance and was in and out of hospital and after-care for seven years. Jean and I sneaked back to the burned out remains the next day because we wanted to find our new shoes that Uncle George had given us the previous Christmas. We just couldn't understand that shoes would burn – how could they? They had crepe soles and were very strong. Innocence is bliss.

At that time I was five, Isabel nearly four, Gwen two and Phoebe the baby in arms. Poor Mum! She would have been 28 years old then.

All we saved was that chest of drawers – and there we were in the midst of the Depression. We slept on the floor of the Church of England the first night, then on the office floor the second night because the boy scouts had the hall. I can remember Mrs Barrett bringing us a big blue and white plate of bread and jam and a billy of cocoa. Our young appetites soon demolished that and I have never forgotten the taste. God bless Mrs Barrett and her daughters.

After a couple of days, Dad managed to beg or borrow a couple of tents, and we all trudged to Warrandyte where we pitched them near the river just out of the township. We lived there for several months. It's hard to believe, now, but Dad prospected for gold there and found some, however small.

We all enjoyed it and learned to "pan" and to "rock the cradle". Also it was fun to watch the mercury run around in the dishpan when he was separating the gold from the sand. Then we'd all trudge into Warrandyte, across the bridge to the State Savings Bank, where the clerk took the little glass of gold and weighed it and gave Dad some money. Dad usually stopped to have a beer and we all went off "home". Life seemed so easy and care-free, when you're a youngster in the "bush".

We bathed in the river and Mum cooked in the open, until we managed to get a house for rent in Eltham again. "Isherwood's House" it was called – just up Cemetery Road on a hill, between Mrs Hurley's and Vinnie Willet's. The Fordhams were at the back of us. Mrs Bremner had the little shop on the main road and she used to come out and call one of us when she wanted a message up the street. We were always rewarded with home-made ice cream in a glass with a long spoon.

On Sundays, they sometimes had picnics and motor bike races in the park opposite the shop. The motor cyclists used to race around pegs and flags stuck in the ground. We used to watch from the hill at our place or from the roof of the old cable tram that was lodged in the park. It was fun. We had moved further around the corner, near the short cut road when the floods came and saw all that Yarra area under water.

Fire, flood, hunger and the dole – that was the order of those years, but we remained healthy rosy cheeked children.

Eltham Higher Elementary School was built by then and I was looking forward to going there. However, work was scarce and Dad was forever chasing jobs, so, off to Bittern we went with the promise of work, painting at the Flinders Naval Depot.

There starts another story.

5 September 1998

We were blessed with another little sister in 1933, and – this part interests me too. Rev. R.G. Arthur was the minister at the Methodist Church, and, when he discovered that none of us were christened, he had us all “done” together.

Surely this must have been an EVENT. Six little girls in boots and plain cotton dresses, going up to be “DONE”. I can remember those horrible “Susso” books, so named because they were government issue for people on the dole – during the Depression.



L-R: Jean (dressed as the father), Edith (as the mother) and Gwladys (the baby) McLean



L-R: Phoebe, Isabel (dressed as the son) and Gwen McLean



Gwladys Evelyn McLean born 6 Sep 1933

Pioneers of Eltham, 1st prize in Group Section, Centenary Parade, Eltham Lower Park, 15 December 1934
Photos: Hector McLean - taken on his old Kodak box camera

Then, another memorable event when Melbourne had its Centenary celebrations – Eltham was just out of the 15 mile radius, so we had our celebrations separately – a procession from the Eltham Station to the lower reserve over the bridge. Our Mum dressed us all up in home-made old-style clothes, and we won the group prize as “Pioneers of Eltham”. I still have a couple of faded snapshots of that, and there was something in the local paper. I think my sister said there was a paragraph in the Hurstbridge Advertiser in the State Library on 21.12.34 too.

This is an abridged version of the letters from Edith Jones.

I was born in 1943 to Bernie and Wally Dodkins at the Old House known as Greensborough and Diamond Valley Hospital in Grimshaw Street Greensborough.

Mum and Dad rented the Miners Cottage on Main Road Research one block back from Reynolds Road. The house was owned by the two sisters, Miss Reynolds, who lived in Brinkotter Road.

Mum and Dad first arrived at Research in 1939 and as they were hard working people who never had a great deal of money, they rented the cottage, which was in a state of total disrepair. There were just dirt floors in two of the four rooms and heaps of rubbish and empty cans and bottles filling one of these rooms. They set about to clean the cottage to make it liveable and very soon with much effort it became a home.



The Miner's Cottage owned by the Reynolds family and rented by the Dodkins family - it was demolished on 2 March 1987

Photograph - Lyn Hardiman

My memories are very fond of the times we spent together growing up with my two sibling brothers, Laurie and Tom. Open paddocks, the old aqueduct to play hide and seek with my friends and of course the Research Primary School, which was just one large room, as I remember, with three classes all under the control of our Principal, Mr. Brandon. There was an asphalt tennis court in Old Warrandyte Road, just where the fire station is now located and we would often play a game of tennis there as a family.

One of my special times was inviting Jillian Freer, who lived next door in the Milk Bar, which is no longer there, to join me with a stall to raise money for the Radio Station 3DB, Royal Childrens' Hospital Appeal. We were just eight years old and of course Mum and Dad helped us and we raised over one hundred pounds, which at that time was a huge amount of money, so much so our photo presenting the money was published in the Sun Newspaper.

Over the many years Eltham district suffered huge bushfires and Research never escaped. I remember the time that the fires raged through the paddocks surrounding our house in the mid 1960's, burning several properties on the Main Road. Mum was determined not to lose her home and stood firm hosing the house and surrounds until finally the firemen carried her off the property with her loudly protesting. Her efforts were not in vain, as the fire stopped just ten metres from the house due to her saturating the ground, but strangely the brick house next door, which was cleared all round burnt to the ground.

Many memories to enjoy such as the dances that were held regularly at the Research Hall that now hosts the Eltham Little Theatre. As a family we would all go there on a Saturday night and watch all the adults ballroom dance and also square dance.

In the late 1950's my father Wally and my Uncle Jack Philp decided Research needed a football team and started with a meeting of interest. The local community was very receptive and a team was formed. Wally and Bernie held a BBQ at their home every Sunday to raise funds for the Club. The Club had modest success in the early days, but it finally wound up some 20 or so years on. This was a time that occupied the youth in the area and they were able to meet and join in a team game making lots of friends on the way.

Another fascinating feature was Lyon Brothers bus. Lyon Brothers had the local garage in Eltham for mechanical repairs and suppliers of fuel and was located on the western side of the Main Road next to the Post Office. The bus ran from the Eltham Station through Research and was the way I travelled home in the early days from Eltham High School and later when I travelled by train to and from Melbourne where I worked. The bus was of the vintage variety yet provided a much-valued part of the local scenery.

Madam Pietzcker was a very good friend of our family, and was the widow of the Swiss Consul. She lived in a beautiful home known as “Ballara” just opposite our home. The builder of the original homestead was Les Docksey, the former owner of the business now known as Eltham Home Timber and Hardware. Les was a former councillor for the Shire of Eltham and was the shire president for two terms.

“Ballara” of course is now a Reception Home for weddings. Dad was always helping Madam with her maintenance, although his main interest was to do the final landscape of the grounds and he planted out the island in the middle of the garden lake that “Ballara” overlooked. It is still there in all its splendour.

I remember when we had the greengrocery man, Mr Lacey, deliver our greens weekly and the man, whose name escapes me, who brought rabbits to our door, as well as an ice truck delivering ice for the Coolgardie safe, and a baker delivering our bread.

Mum and Dad finally moved from their little Miners Cottage to caretake the Kangaroo Ground Memorial Tower and were able to turn what was a somewhat unkept house and gardens into a beautifully landscaped and well-presented property. They stayed there for around ten years before retiring.

These are just some of the many lovely memories I have of growing up in Research.

Eltham Cemetery Stories

Liz Pidgeon

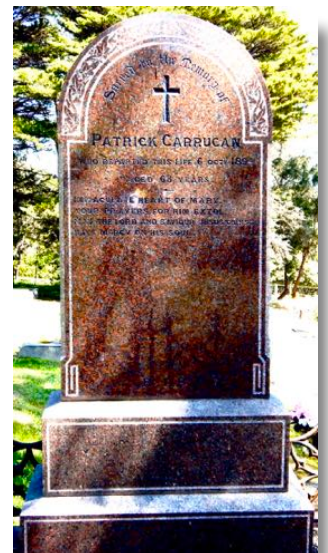
Mary Currucan

Mary O’Brien was born in County Clare, Ireland in 1838. In 1856, when she was 18 years old, she married Patrick Carrucan who was 26 years old. Later that same year, the young couple left Ireland, bound for Australia, together with Mary’s father Sylvester O’Brien. Once there, they joined Patrick’s sister Bridget and her husband John Coleman in Eltham.

Initially they occupied a small Eltham farm of some 14 acres, near Dalton Street. For the first few years, Patrick and Mary lived in a hut on the farm till Sylvester built them a house at the corner of Dalton St and Bible St.

A family story is recorded that Mary could only read and write in Gaelic and that she later learned English from her children. Between 1858 and 1874, Mary bore ten children.

Patrick died in 1894 aged 63 from a broken back after being run over by his own bullock cart. Mary lived on for a further 33 years living with her son Mick and his family at the original farm house until she died in November 1927 at the age of 90. She was buried with Patrick in Eltham Cemetery. An ornate headstone was restored in the 1970s, but unfortunately it does not include recognition for Mary.



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



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