

# Newsletter



No. 267 October 2022

## How we remember

Jim Connor

Cemeteries play a significant part in our cultural and local history. These are a place to formally remember those who are no longer with us and can also be a source for historical research.

In respect of the early, and ongoing history of Eltham, we are fortunate the Eltham Cemetery Trust is committed to ensuring this is recognised and valued. Our society regularly arranges heritage tours of the Eltham Cemetery, with appreciated support from the Trust.

Military historian Terry Beaton has undertaken detailed investigations of the returned service veterans remembered at the Eltham Cemetery, as well as at the Kangaroo Ground and Nillumbik cemeteries. In doing so he has, in some instances, added to the records previously available, including identifying those having a direct association with the local district.

Terry, along with Sheila Beaton, who are members of our society, have also organised Flag Tributes at these cemeteries for recent ANZAC Day and Remembrance Days. These are powerful commemorations, as well as visual reminders of the numbers of veterans in each cemetery.

How we remember those who have gone before us can be very personal and at times, an ongoing part of our lives.



Historical societies and Cemetery Trusts play a part in maintaining this remembrance.

Flag Tribute at the Eltham Cemetery - Remembrance Day 2022

Photograph - Jim Connor

We hope you enjoy a peaceful and relaxing time during this Festive Season and have a healthy and successful year in 2023



## Next Society Meeting - Our Christmas Function

7.30pm Wednesday 14th December 2022

Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre - Library Place, Eltham



## Victorian Collections Cataloguing Award

Volunteer-run organisations

HIGHLY  
COMMENDED  
2022

At the Victorian Museums and Galleries Awards held on October 4th 2022, Victorian Collections and AMaGA Victoria announced that the Eltham District Historical Society was Highly Commended for the Victorian Collections Awards for Excellence in Museum Cataloguing: volunteer-run organisations.

This commendation acknowledges organisations like EDHS that have been cataloguing their collections online using Victorian Collections. Organisations were judged on the number of items catalogued, the proportion of items catalogued with accompanying photos, the quality of the records, the depth of historical research involved, and the percentage of records made public.

Currently EDHS has over 13,000 records catalogued on Victorian Collections, which can be browsed at <https://victoriancollections.net.au/organisations/eltham-district-historical-society#collection-records>.

This award is a fitting recognition of the extensive amount of dedicated work our Collections team has invested, over a number of years, in scanning, researching, cataloguing and uploading images to the Victorian Collections website, where these can be viewed by anyone, at anytime, from anywhere.

This would not have been able to happen without the donations EDHS received to source and purchase the required equipment, computer, scanners etc., to enable these activities to be undertaken. Of course, our Collection team members, especially Peter Pidgeon, have contributed much time in processing and recording our valued local history, for which we thank them and are forever grateful.

### Our Christmas Function - Wednesday 14th December 2022

Our Christmas function will be held at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre from 7.30pm on Wednesday 14th December 2022.



The format will be varied to encourage a relaxed, fun evening and will include some trivia, a few games, as well as a Christmas style supper and time to just chat.

All members are welcome and we look forward to sharing our end of year celebration with you.

This is an abridged version of a talk given to the Society by Diana Bassett-Smith in 2003 and later provided to the Society for our records. (Originally published in EDHS newsletter March 2010)

To paraphrase Hillaire Belloc:

*I will build a house of thick mud to shelter me from the cold I will hold my house in the high wood  
Within a walk of town and pub  
And my neighbours shall drink with me*

On that social aspect I am going to think back over some seventy years. Scarce money limited to essentials, land available, if one paid the amounts owing on rates. Women worked at basic jobs, had children and stayed home. Even in the 1950s in some areas of employment, if you married, you resigned. I had to. Maybe that's why women became such adept handymen. {DIY Persons}. Not nearly so today, as I have noticed with our children's friends.

1939 WWII, was perhaps the beginning of social change, the men enlisted, or employed in munitions and women alongside them, education was changing, married, had our families, wives, still, generally stayed home and couples essentially remained a one income family. During the five years of war few if any houses had been built. 1946, men returned to a shortage of houses and materials. There were restrictions on what one could build, for example in size and no verandahs were permitted. There was a lack of skilled tradesmen. Mortgages were generally only available to couples based on the husband's income.

War service loans were available to ex-servicemen and women. Young people had grown up, they were standing on their own feet in the true outback tradition. They had confidence in their ability. They had matured, outlooks broadened. Grown up in the last twenty years. There were jobs. A low rate of unemployment.

Eltham was known for its individualness, people were impatient, had become more independent, couples were not prepared to wait for supplies or builders, so Eltham became a haven for owner builders.

Land at a reasonable price was available. Grapevine talk of soil types, what a friend of a friend was doing. No sewerage. Piped water maybe. Few made roads, not too many even opened. There was the charm of the area in abundance. Basic shops which most of us can name, a dog box train service, phones, schools and a visiting doctor.

The DIY era began with a vengeance.

After buying ones block of land, perhaps following a rough walking track along which one hoped to determine the allotment's correct alignment.

Evenings at home which may have been a flat in town or a bungalow at the in-laws, young people mulling and puzzling over "Modern Houses" books with glossy pages of what one would like to build against what one could afford. We fronted up to the Shire Office with their sketch plan and formalities completed, several pounds lighter, one was armed with the necessary permits.

Couples became owner builders, muddies. Wheelbarrows, shovels, picks and crowbars were not always freely available. Basic hand tools, such as hammers, saws chisels, tapes and levels were in short supply, particularly nails and screws. Oh, the advantages of Adobe and Pise!! Construction found all around the world, where resources are limited. The famous Dejenne's Mosque of Adobe, in Mali and nearby buildings in Timbuktu, West Africa, to Eltham. Most know that Adobe is mud brick, and Pise is monoconstruction such as found in France.



Now back to Eltham.

Friends built a large barn of mud bricks and then lived comfortably in it whilst building their spacious mudbrick home of their dreams. None other than Ron and Yvonne Jelbart. They had a housekeeper, Miss O'Brien, (Licia) a red head, solidly built woman, who whizzed round Eltham in the Jelbart LHD Jeep, which, of course, was a carryall not only to collect the children from the train but to pick up the building supplies. Miss O'Brien was part of the home work force and could be found rendering inside walls with a mixture of cow manure which made a great seal of the mud and reduced dust.

Like many Elthamites, we generally used the back gate or short cut across the fence to visit friends. Ron and Yvonne had magnificent, large iron gates from a cemetery at their main entrance, rarely used in early days, the Arthur Street rear gateway was the regular thoroughfare. I think the gates have since been moved to that area.

Today the barn has been modernised and a delight. While a stately house stands atop the hill, a symbol of inspiration, dedication and hard work.

*(The Jelbart Barn property is now owned and occupied by EDHS members Michael and Wendy Wilson)*



The Jelbart Barn property during a EDHS Heritage Excursion - March 2021 - Photograph - Jim Connor

Another home on the opposite hill built by Bernie and Isobel.

Bernard Smith, (Bernie) was a civil engineer, built on a solid concrete foundation, with interior walls of troweled concrete, and the outside clad in stone collected from their twenty acres by Isobel and Bernie. A huge fireplace built by Jackie Fabbro. Isobel built walls, mixed concrete, heaved stones to clad the outer walls, made the garden, frequently helped by Charlie Bode. Construction was over more than seventeen years. Many will be familiar with the flat roof. Bernie had designed their home for the future, the roof is strong enough for a helicopter.

Their huge dining room and lounge was home to many Pony Club and Rural Group parties, and Scout luncheons - there was always time for a drink with friends. It did not matter if the house was finished or not, we still entertained and were entertained. Today it seems everything has to be just so!



The Smith house built by Bernie and Isobel Smith November 2022 - Photograph - Jim Connor

*(Nerremman Homestead is owned and occupied by EDHS member, Alex Smith, a son of Bernard and Isobel Smith.)*

Next door the Rices on one side and the Gardiners on the other, they too, were building their dream homes from the earth and rock of Eltham.

If a job was too high or a beam too heavy or a problem with a plan, help was not far away. There was good camaraderie between owner builders.

Eltham hills rang with the sound of cheerful voices, clang of tools, music from a radio or from ardent musicians practising.

Meanwhile, another young couple were planning their dream home on a block at Peter Street Eltham.

No services were available. Water from a neighbour's half inch copper pipe had to be negotiated. A large hole had to be excavated by pick and crowbar for the septic, arrangements agreed to with neighbours to tap the power.

So with sketch plans, a ton of hope and the energy of youth, Bruce and Pat Moore began building their Pise house. They would excavate, mix and shovel mud into the wooden form work, to be evenly spread by Bruce who would tamp it down then ram it with a "Kanga" rammer.

As soon as they had built enough to live in they moved in and so had more time to spend building their dream house, during weekends, school holidays and in longer evenings.

They had a rigorous work schedule and would work for a couple of hours then pause, Bruce to practise his cornet for an hour or so, whilst refreshing themselves with a drink and maybe a word with neighbours who were also building, adding to, or finishing their houses.

Then Bruce and Pat would once more shovel, fill the form, tamp and ram. They worked from early morning to late. In between studying, working as teachers and raising their four children.



*(The Moore property is now owned and occupied by EDHS members Russell and Marion Yeoman)*

Russell Yeoman at the former Moore property  
July 2013 - Photograph - Jim Connor

Opposite were George and Berry Davidson and daughter Kate, at their aptly named house, "Mudstone Acre".

Behind us in what was known as the General's House, Pise built by John Harcourt, lived Marjorie and Harry Hammond and son Rupert. Harry had a very successful dunnage business in Port Melbourne and was a wonderful source of oregon and other good timber. Another supplier was, of course, Whelan the Wrecker.-

Many of us rendered the outside of our houses with the "White House Mixture", a bag of Limil, 4 cups of sugar, 4 cups of casein, water to a thick consistency and would be either painted on with a coarse brush or rubbed on with a bag, "bagging". It preserved and waterproofed the Pise or mud bricks. Colouring could be added but needed to be done all at once otherwise a wall could end in various shades.

Meanwhile, in Kangaroo Ground another young couple were living in two car cases with their children as they started work on their dream house, it was very large. She made over seven thousand mudbricks, learnt carpentry so all the doors and jams are hand made. It is a roomy comfortable house yet, as she told me one day, the happiest time of their marriage was with their children living in the shed of car cases.

Even when labour became less scarce being young and seeing what the neighbours achieved was an incentive to others and again no one in those days took out big mortgages as happens today.

Residents gradually added on to their postwar restricted sized house as they saved up, materials became less scarce, and we shared 'how to' knowledge.

Additional permits with stricter requirements became the order of the day. We were still on a shared 1/2 copper water pipe, which was not coping with growing families. So applied to MMBW (Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works) for permission to put in a tank. Outrageous. They ultimately agreed so long as in no way could the water from it flow into MMBW supplied water. Easy a separate pipe. We received a permit, bought and erected a stand with neighbours to help put the tank up and presto a reliable source of water. Timber was bought from Harry, roofing materials from where ever and later Les Docksey's.

I well remember building our sunroom. We extended the roof and enclosed the patio. I was 7 months pregnant and keeping fit climbing up and down the ladder as we wanted it completed before our second infant arrived, that was nearly 50 years ago.

Yet, it only seemed like yesterday. I was reminded of it recently as I climbed on the roof of our hay shed to nail down the iron after the storms of late.

Now clusters of "Muddies" are throughout the Shire not all owner built. Today people still ponder about their dream home, ensuites, spas, games room, four or five bedrooms, so they become double income parents, maybe with children in care. A large mortgage. Sometimes I think perhaps if they chose something out of town like many of us did and enjoy a simpler home life some would be happier with time to share a drink with friends and neighbours and kick a football with their children.

So:

*"Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam be it every so humble, there is no place like home".*

### **Note:**

*The building regulations at that time contained very little about mud brick, Adobe and Pise construction standards. In fact, many of us contributed to the research and persuaded banks and others that mud was good if handled properly, gradually it came to be recognised as an acceptable building medium, also to meet requirements for mortgage lenders. CSIRO did quite a lot of work in this regard - Guy Gresford, Secretary of CSIRO, lived next door in a timber John Harcourt house, the first timber house that John built. Guy was very aware of "Muddies" having had a long association with the district. In fact, his in-laws lived in Swan Street in a Harcourt Pise house. Others too were using their experience and influence on the authorities to recognise Adobe and Pise.*



## Eltham Railway Line

Article from 'The Argus' 12 December 1911

According to a correspondent in 'The Argus' on Saturday residents of the Eltham district are desirous that the morning trains from Eltham should arrive at Melbourne an hour earlier. It is also contended that the time occupied on the journey on weekdays should be reduced to about the same as that taken on Sundays. It is stated by railway officials that some time ago a number of residents requested that the train which was due to leave Eltham at 7.33 a.m. should be started an hour earlier.



Eltham Station c.1907

Photograph by J.H. Clark - EDHS Collection

Regular travellers who had made their business arrangements in connection with this train were consulted by the department, but as the majority of them were strongly opposed to any alteration of the time-table no further action was taken.

On Sundays trains ran through to Eltham, and, as there was no transference of passengers at Heidelberg, the journey was naturally covered in a quicker time than on week days. When the new station at Heidelberg was built however, there would be very little detention.

### Railway Trestle Bridge, Eltham

The Eltham Shire Council has received advice from the Railways Department of a proposal for replacement of the railway bridge over Diamond Creek in Eltham Central Park. A previous proposal for replacement by an embankment and culverts was abandoned following community and Council protests.

The new proposal, which is apparently at a preliminary stage, involves replacement with a shorter bridge and lowering of the railway to just above the park level.

The existing timber trestle bridge is a significant feature of Eltham's character and visible and forms part of the classified park landscape. This matter was considered at the last Historical Society Committee meeting when it was agreed that the society should express its concern at any proposal which involves destruction of the existing bridge.

Source: Shire of Eltham Historical Society newsletter - November 1978

### Court Jottings

#### A Good Carver

People giving evidence in court take it very seriously as a rule, but the exception was noticed in Eltham on Tuesday when a Diamond Creek businessman wished to strengthen an accused's position regarding his employment in a hotel. He referred to the man's ability as a carver, which created laughter, which in most courts would have been followed by a stentorian voice crying out: "Silence in the Court." This witness said that a licensee told him that the temporary employee at the hotel could carve a duck to go further than one carved by anyone else in the district.

Source: The Advertiser - Friday July 8th 1932

## Eltham Races

The inhabitants of Eltham seem determined upon 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 enable 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 'Digger Purse' and if they succeed in this there will probably be a second day's sport. Thursday 20th inst., is the time fixed, as it will be seen by a reference to our advertising columns. A numerous attendance is expected, more especially as the beautiful scenery around Eltham will be a sufficient inducements 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.

Source: The Argus, Melbourne - 15 December 1855



## Horse Racing in Eltham

Horse racing was one of the earliest recreational activities reported on in the Eltham area. Races were held regularly from 1855. The first races in that year were held on a cleared flat near the town, which was 'well adapted to a three-quarter-mile race-course'. This may have been on the original Eltham 'village reserve'. A two-day race meeting took place in 1856.

A racecourse and another recreation reserve was set aside in 1857. Prominent local men Henry Stooke, John Brown and John Bell were appointed as trustees. In 1865–66 a new temporary reserve of 48 acres was created. It is likely but not proven that the annual Eltham races held subsequently were conducted on the new reserve. The 1866 race meeting was run to Victoria Race Club rules and races included 'The Diggers Purse', a two-mile race called 'The Eltham Town Plate', 'The Publican's Purse', 'The District Purse' and a handicap hurdle race. The Eltham Race Club was formed in 1867. By the late 1860s it appears that there was diminishing interest, with only a few local horses and no visitors from the city. In 1877 the temporary racecourse reserve was revoked, but a new 57-acre Eltham Park was reserved.

The Eltham Racing Club became defunct and no races were held for 10 years before a revival in 1888, when races were held in Eltham Park. Newspaper accounts of these races dry up around 1903.

Source: Nillumbik Shire thematic environmental history - 2016 Revision



## Harriet Agrita Falkiner - 1848-1923 Eltham Pioneer

Harriet Agrita Falkiner was the daughter of Irish born immigrants Frederick Falkiner and Fanny, nee Gaile who had married in 1841.

They eventually settled in the district on the Diamond Creek and Yarra River around 1848 where they grazed cattle and established an orchard. The original family home was a pioneer settler's cottage built by Frederick in present day Ely Street.

A plan for fifty allotments in the township of Eltham was announced in 1848 and the Falkiner family were the first to purchase an allotment. It was about this time that Harriet was born. She was one of eight living children.

By 1854, the population of Eltham township was 282 and Harriet's father became the first postmaster, but only for a short time.

Although she would have been old enough to be among the first pupils at the new State School when it opened in 1855, we can find no evidence of Harriet in the school register at this time.

Harriet grew up to watch the growth of Little Eltham following the discovery of gold at Andersons Creek and the Caledonia Goldfields.

She would have witnessed the construction of the trestle bridge and the coming of the railway line and she would have seen young men she knew in the town go off to war and possibly been part of the Welcome Home Committee and efforts behind establishing the Avenue of Honour afterwards.

Harriet did not marry and probably spent the majority of her life supporting and caring for her parents and then her siblings in Eltham.

Towards the end of her life, she became ill and was cared for by her sister-in-law at her home in Rattray Road, Montmorency where Harriet died on December 23rd 1923, aged 74 years. A sad Christmas followed for the family and they buried their sister in the Eltham Cemetery on Boxing Day.

She must have been very much revered by her family. They erected a significant headstone over her grave, complete with verse, which leaves us with a sense of what kind of person Harriet was.

*"Her cheerful ways and smiling face  
Are pleasant to recall  
She had a smile for everyone  
And died beloved by all"*

Although, not a unique inscription, it was a phrase sometimes used as part of newspaper death announcements between the 1920s and 1950s. Nevertheless, it a lovely one.



Grave of Harriet Agrita Falkiner  
Eltham Cemetery - November 2022  
Photograph Jim Connor

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State Member for Eltham**

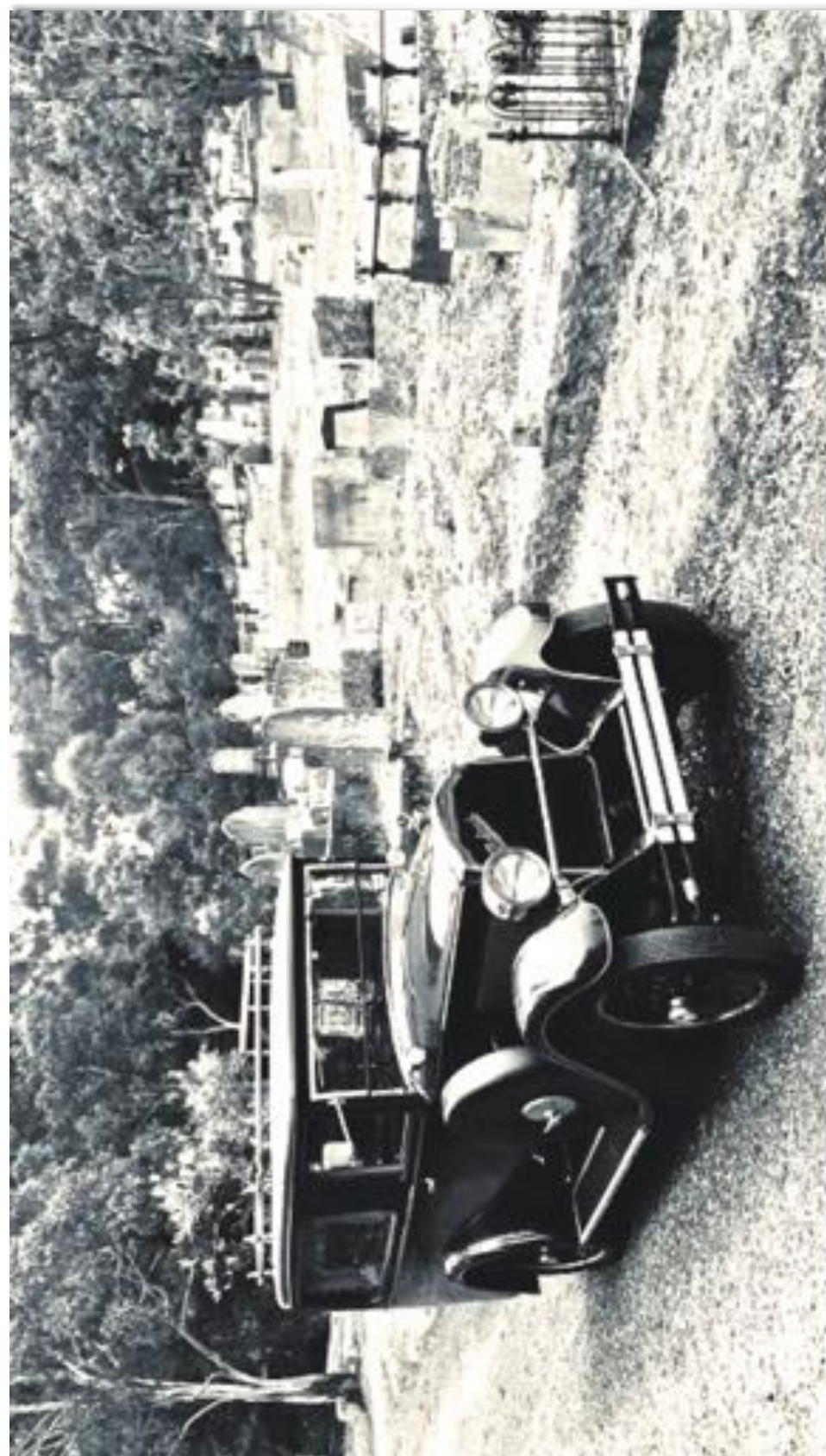
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Our postal address is 728 Main Road, Eltham 3095

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





## ELTHAM CEMETERY

— EST. 1858 —

Burial Grounds: Mt Pleasant Road, Eltham  
[www.elthamcemetery.com](http://www.elthamcemetery.com)



## *Our Eltham, Our History*

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