



Legacy

Jim Connor

The Cambridge Dictionary defines legacy as :

something that is a part of your history or that remains from an earlier time

The work of historical societies and groups often involves working with legacies left by others, thereby further acknowledging the memories or the long-lasting impact of particular events or actions that took place in the past.

History, whether it be world wide, national, local or familial is all about retaining and building on those legacies. Leaving a legacy is important for many reasons. It can serve as an example for future generations, preserving memories and teaching valuable life lessons. It can also be a source of pride and motivation, inspiring others to strive for greatness, regardless of their circumstances.

Often historical societies rely on those individuals who have a passion for history and do value the contributions and support of others on the journey. In this way we will help retain such legacies for generations to come.

Whether it be hard copies, digital files or valuable recordings of told stories these are what form our knowledge of our history. Our actions today become our history tomorrow.

Harry Gilham, the immediate past president of our Eltham District Historical Society, who died on 25th February 2023, leaves a significant legacy with what he achieved over many years for our Society, as well as through his contributions in his various other areas of community interest, as mentioned on page 3 in this newsletter.



Vale - Harry Charles Gilham

24th March 1928 - 25th February 2023

Our Annual General Meeting - Saturday 15th April 2023

Our next meeting at 2.00pm on Saturday 15th April 2023 will be our **Annual General Meeting**, which includes the presentation of annual reports, as well as the election of office bearers for the coming year.

The official notification of the Annual General Meeting and Agenda are on page 9 in this newsletter. It will be held at our usual meeting venue, the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre in Library Place Eltham. Please note this is on a Saturday afternoon and members and guests are welcome to attend.

At this meeting we are pleased to have Peter Pidgeon, our vice president, as our speaker to talk about a selection of photographs recently added to our collection. Peter, who is our Digital Collections, Website and Social Media Manager, has scanned and catalogued much of the content on our Victorian Collections website and maintains our website, facebook and social media.

The focus of his presentation will be on new additions to the collection, records of interest that have been digitised over the past year and added to Victorian Collections and the processes we undertake.



We look forward to seeing you.

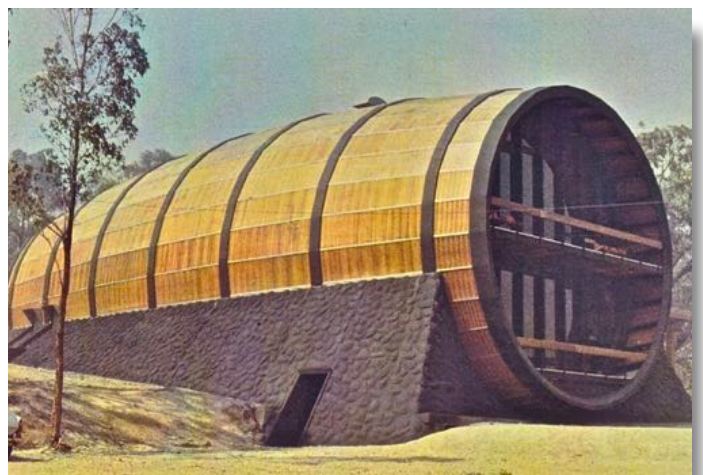
George and Janet Bird and family c.1904-1905 (new acquisition)

Heritage Walk - Saturday 6th May 2023 - Research Valley South Side

This walk includes sites of heritage interest close to the Research shops and a walk through the 1940s subdivision that forms the southern part of Research. However the main feature of the walk are the views of the Research valley and beyond as we walk back into the valley along the power line easement track. This will include views to the site of the former Eltham Barrel restaurant.

This walk on Saturday 6th May will start at 2.00pm at the Research shopping centre in Main Road (Melway ref. 22 G2). The distance is about 3 km and it will take about 2 hours.

This free walk is open to the general 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.



Eltham Barrel c.1969
Photograph from EDHS collection

Vale - Harry Charles Gilham

It was sad that Harry Gilham, our valued former president, died on Saturday 25th February 2023.

Harry Gilham was born and raised in Heidelberg, the second of four boys. He walked 100 metres to Heidelberg Primary School, then later rode his bike to Preston Technical School.

He joined the Scouting movement in 1946 as a cub, moving through the system eventually becoming Assistant District Commissioner. He developed a long - held passion for the High Country in Victoria walking, camping and skiing (even making his own skis).

After a few jobs, he enrolled at night school with the aim of becoming a Technical Teacher. Then, while teaching he became active in many union campaigns to improve the education system, especially the Technical system to serve the needs of all students.

He became involved in the formation of the Technical Teachers Union of Victoria (TTAV) and was Secretary and later elected Vice President. He was an inaugural member of the State Government Teacher Registration Board and in 1977 became the Deputy Chair (Technical Schools section) until his retirement.

He moved with Sue Dyet, his wife, to Eltham in 1976 and actively contributed to community groups over many years.

Harry was President of the Eltham District Historical Society from 1993 until 2009 and was a driving force behind its success.

He was engaged in many personal historical projects including the history of local schools, the local railway and the Eltham Justice Precinct. He was instrumental in establishing the Local History Centre in Main Road, Eltham. His ongoing commitment to the operation of this centre was a significant contribution to the provision of a permanent home for the Society.

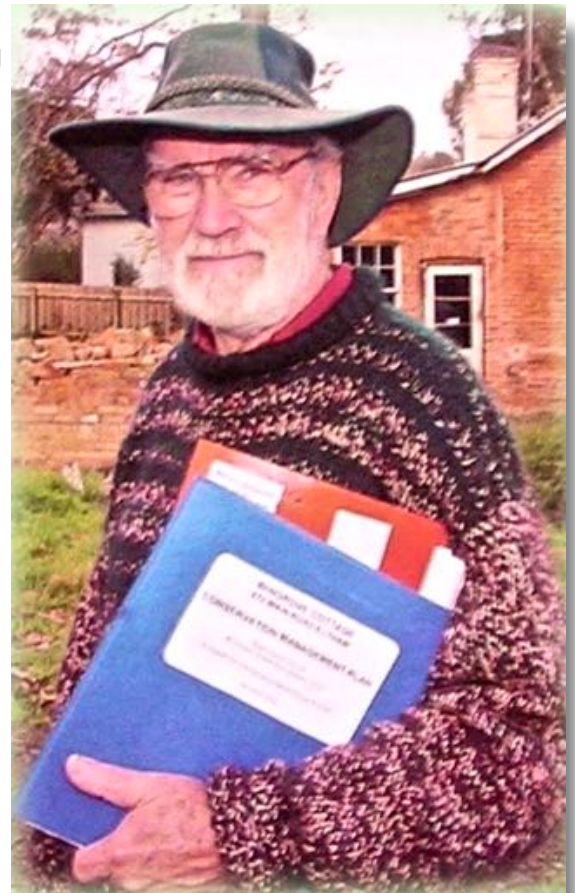
Harry helped establish the Society's records base and Chronology project and was a great 'letter to the editor' writer and a keen follower of local events.

He was Convener of Council's Kangaroo Ground War Memorial Tower Committee, president of the Eltham and District Winemakers Guild, a wine judge in Victoria and Tasmania and personally won many awards, including the Gold Award for Mead at the Royal Melbourne Show in 1992 and 1997. He was also an active member of the Eltham Library Re-development Special Committee and chair of the Eltham Living and Learning Centre Advisory Committee.

Harry and Sue were named joint 2008 Nillumbik Citizens of the Year, in acknowledgement of their decades of community service given to their local communities.

In 2009 Harry received a Royal Historical Society of Victoria Award of Merit, for exceptional, meritorious service. The legacy he has left is significant and will continue to be built on.

We send our sincere condolences to Sue and family; Harry will be missed by so many people.



Harry Gilham
Photograph - Diamond Valley Leader
July 7th 2004

Eltham Hotels

Based on an Article by Harry Gilham from the Eltham District Historical Society's Newsletter Number 183 November, 2008.

Between 1852 and 1931 Eltham supported two Hotels. The Eltham Hotel has undergone numerous 'rebuilt's, but is still on its site and is still called the Eltham Hotel.

Opposite, in the 1852 period, a second Hotel was built - across Maria Street (Main Road). This Hotel was built in prefabricated sections of timber and was a product made in Singapore, thus the cedar wood frames, doors, floors, walls, windows, etc., making up the fourteen room building, were seen to be from a 'foreign forest' and not native hardwood. Also, as you see in the photograph, the South end was of two storeys and was known as the ball-room for social and community events. Gatherings of note were in 1856 when the local Road Board held its first election of members; 1860 saw the inaugural meeting of the Eltham Church Committee which later built St. Margaret's Church of England in Pitt Street.

Also in the 1860s the Cobb & Co. Coaches made the Hotel a stopping place on their way to and from the Woods Point Goldfields.

Its name was firstly The Fountain Hotel, then in 1883 it was known as the Evelyn Hotel until 1919, when it was de-licensed to become a rooming house.

In 1910 the 'ballroom' end of the building was severely burnt out and the repairs replaced the two storeys with one storey. On February 8th 1931 at 3.44 p.m., on a hot north windy day, the building and stable were destroyed by fire.

History of the early 1850s shows that Melbourne saw not only timber prefabricated buildings but portable iron houses, which arrived in wooden crates from England. Corrugated iron had become part of replacing roofs and could be used as external walls. The crates in which the house parts were carried became the lining of the ceiling and walls.

The newspaper sale items read like furniture sales, except that libraries, town halls, ball-rooms, public halls and church buildings were also available in kit form and all you needed were people who could bolt together everything supplied, with the spanners enclosed in the kit.

The Hotel cum rooming house building lasted for eighty years. The vacant site on the corner of Pitt Street has become an overflow car park. Perhaps a mounted image of what was there will be a suitable reminder that this area was the centre of "Little Eltham".



The Eltham Hotel when owned by C. Watson
Photograph from the EDHS Collection*



The Fountain Hotel later known as The Evelyn Hotel
Photograph from the EDHS Collection*

The origins of the Rob Roy Hillclimb in Clintons Road, Christmas Hills go back to 1935, when representatives from the then Light Car Club of Australia inspected the property known as Clinton's Pleasure Grounds with a view to establishing a venue for hillclimb meetings.

The first meeting was then run on 1st February 1937, and the track fully bituminised in 1939. Many meetings were conducted over succeeding years by the Light Car Club, including nine Australian Hillclimb Championships.

In 1992 the MG Car Club (MGCC) was successful in obtaining a ten year lease on the property, and reconstruction began, which involved re-laying the entire surface, improving access roads, and installation of guard rails on the causeway. The result was a faithful re-creation of the original track. During this period an immense amount of voluntary work was put in by MGCC members in all areas of its reconstruction.

Since that time many improvements have been made to the site and facilities. The last event on the original track layout was held on 22nd May 2022, prior to a major improvement project. These works, have involved many MGCC volunteers, who have spent countless hours creating a new 'Rob Roy' facility, including additional spectator facilities, an upgrade of the track and sealing of internal and entry roads, as well as a separate road for competitors returning from the finish line.

An inaugural Rob Roy Revival weekend to welcome back competitors and spectators, and as a tribute to this great history, was planned for the 18th and 19th of March 2023. However, due to extreme weather this was only held on Sunday 19th March, when invitation-only cars took on the hillclimb, which holds a special place in Australian motorsport history.

As attendees to this festival event were encouraged to dress in vintage 50s and 60s fashion, many enjoyed the period atmosphere and supported various traders there. A special feature was the appearance of the restored 1949 Bedford truck originally owned by Len Parker, who was a regular sight around the Eltham district for almost 40 years, between 1939 and 1978, selling fruit and veggies from the back of his truck. He did this in this truck, bought new in 1950 for 900 pounds, and restored by his son Jim in 1999. Len's story, by his daughter Grace de Visser, was in our December 2019 newsletter.

All in all, a wonderful, enjoyable event to reopen the Rob Roy Hillclimb and launch it into another important phase of our local history.

Source - MGCC website - mgcc.com.au/mgcc/



Philip Gray in his 1934 Ford special
the last car to use the 'old' Rob Roy Hillclimb track
22nd May 2022 - Photograph - Jim Connor



Don Woods in his MGB
the first car to use the 'new' Rob Roy Hillclimb track
5th March 2023 - Photograph - Jim Connor

Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit

This article is from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Territory_Special_Reconnaissance_Unit

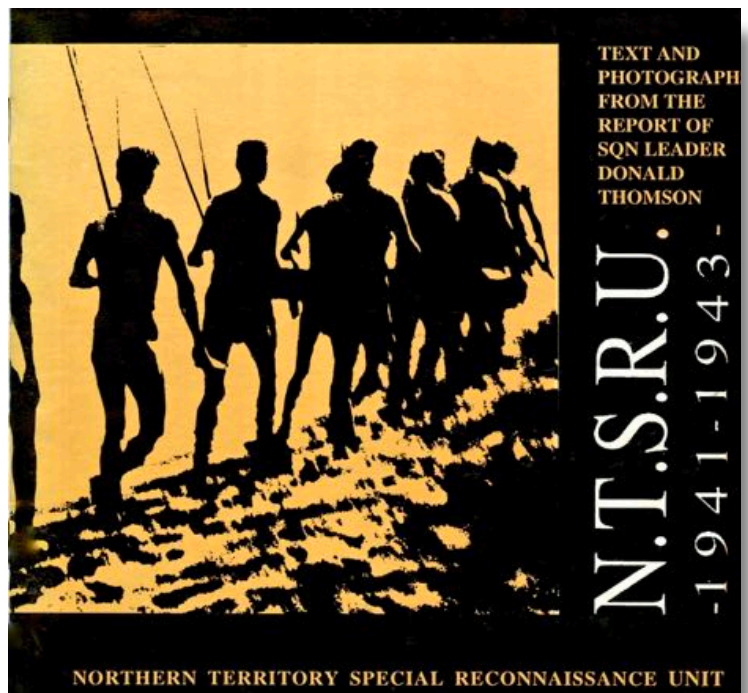
Donald and Dorita Thompson lived in Eltham South. Dorita was a member of the Eltham District Historical Society

The Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit (NTSRU) was an irregular warfare unit of the Australian Army during World War II, composed mainly of Aboriginal people from the Northern Territory. Formed in 1941, the unit patrolled the coast of Arnhem Land during 1942–43 searching for signs of Japanese landings and trained to fight as guerrillas using traditional weapons in the event of an invasion. In 1943, as the war moved northward from the Australian coast, the NTSRU was disbanded.

Wartime exigencies broke down previous resistance to the enlistment of non-Europeans in the armed forces, with the threat posed to Northern Australia by the Japanese from late-1941 resulting in the formation of a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander units such as the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion. In Northern Australia several irregular units were subsequently formed to utilise the local knowledge and bushcraft skills of the local Aboriginal people to provide surveillance of the more remote parts of the coastline, including the 2/1st North Australia Observer Unit based in Katherine, Northern Territory. Further north, east Arnhem Land was largely uninhabited except for a few Aboriginal Australians and unmapped prior to the war, but was considered a likely area for a possible Japanese landing.

Proposed in mid-1941, the NTSRU was subsequently formed between 12 February and 19 March 1942 under the command of Squadron Leader Donald Thomson, an anthropologist before the war with extensive experience working with the local Yolngu people in the 1930s, several of whom had previously been jailed for killing five Japanese pearlers and three Europeans during the Caledon Bay crisis in 1932–33.

Thomson had been seconded to the Army from the Royal Australian Air Force in June to raise and command the unit. NTSRU personnel included 50 Aboriginal men (such as the Yolngu elder Wonggu and his sons), six Solomon Islanders, a Torres Strait Islander and several white non-commissioned officers. The unit patrolled the coast of Arnhem Land during 1942–43 searching for signs of Japanese landings and trained to fight as guerrillas using traditional weapons in the event of an invasion, while reporting on enemy movements towards Darwin.



Booklet from the EDHS collection

Meanwhile, similar units were raised on Bathurst Island, Melville Island (including the Snake Bay Patrol), the Cox Peninsula and Groote Eylandt. In 1943, as the war moved northward from the Australian coast, the NTSRU was disbanded, and Thomson returned to the Air Force. He was later badly injured in action in Dutch New Guinea, and spent the rest of the war in hospital before being medically discharged. None of the men that served in these irregular units were formally enlisted or paid during the war; however, in 1992 their service was formally acknowledged by the Federal Government with the receipt of pay and service medals.

Yemmerrawannie

No evidence is available to conclusively establish the origins of the name of our Eltham, but it is widely believed to have been named after Eltham in Kent.

The name Eltham first appeared on local maps in 1851. While apparently named after Eltham in England the reason for the connection does not appear to have been recorded, but there is another town of the same name in New South Wales.

The English Eltham (pronounced "Eltam") is situated on the South-Eastern outskirts of London in the London Borough of Greenwich. Some of the early buildings in the borough rank amongst the finest in Western Europe.

Eltham has royal associations which go back to 1305 when Bishop Bek presented his recently completed manor house to Edward Prince of Wales. The building became Eltham Place and was also the home of British monarchs for over 200 years.

An interesting early connection between Australia and its English namesake has been found in Chisholm's Australian Encyclopedia.

The encyclopedia records that an Aboriginal named Yemmerrawannie, about 18 years old, was taken to England with another named Bennelong by Governor Arthur Phillip in 1792.

The story of Bennelong is quite well known and he is commemorated by Sydney Harbour's Bennelong Point. (of Opera House fame). Apparently, Phillip's intention was that the Aborigines' would gain knowledge to help their fellow tribesmen. However, the climate proved too severe for Yemmerrawannie and he died in London on 18th May 1794.

He is buried at Eltham, Kent where a headstone commemorates his grave. Bennelong returned to Australia in 1795.

Source - partly from an article by Russell Yeoman in EDHS newsletter - March 1980



Eltham England - Headstone
at St John the Baptist Church
Photograph - Peter Pidgeon

Eric Rooks Farm: The Nillumbik Gift

Liz Pidgeon

Montmorency local historian Maureen Jones has recently donated her book *Eric Rooks Farm: The Nillumbik Gift*, to our collection. It focuses on the history of the Rooks family and farm, located at 167 Allendale Road, Diamond Creek. The property was first settled in 1865 and held by four generations of the family always retaining its rural landscape. Family archives and historical newspaper reports supplemented with photographs from the collection of Nillumbik Historical Society have contributed to the telling of this family history and history of the property.

Hailing from Cambridgeshire England, the Diamond Creek pioneer settler was Isaac Rooks. He, his brothers and descendants are all profiled. The story of the Maroondah Aqueduct which passed through the property is also discussed including the recent development of the Aqueduct Trail. More recently managed by Eric Rooks whose story is also represented, Eric donated the property to the Shire of Nillumbik upon his death in 2020 with the condition that a Reserve would be established.

Alan Marshall, the internationally renowned author, was closely associated with the Eltham district for much of his adult life. It is therefore appropriate the memory of his contributions are retained and honoured through a sculpture of him, by Marcus Skipper, outside the Eltham Library and a painting of him, by Alan Martin, from the Nillumbik Shire Council art collection, which is usually displayed inside the library near the reception area.

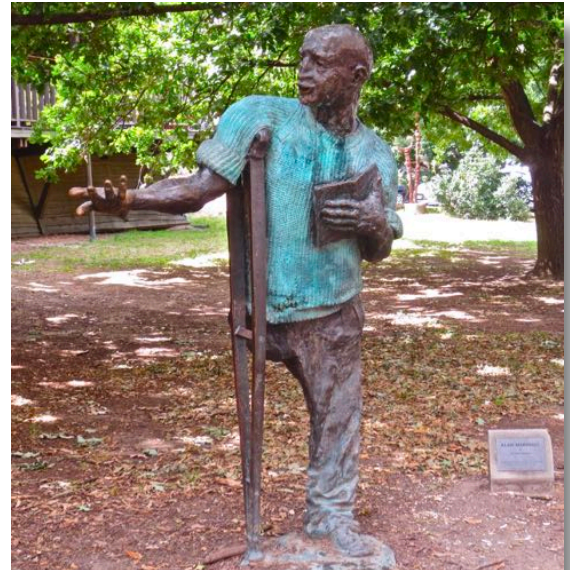
Alan Marshall contracted poliomyelitis (polio) when he was six years old, when living in country Victoria. In 1920 the family moved to Diamond Creek when he was 18 years old, where he was employed at the Eltham Shire Council offices, then in Kangaroo Ground.

In later years he regularly travelled, while continuing to write many stories, often based on his life experiences. He lived in Eltham from 1955, was engaged in local Eltham activities, was internationally recognised for his writings, including those related to children and he had an intimate knowledge of living with a disability. His most famous book, 'I Can Jump Puddles' is based on his life story and the obstacles he faced as a child in trying to overcome his disability. He was an advocate for people with disabilities and also interested in Indigenous matters. Some stories relate to his experiences when travelling and living in Northern Australia, where he was given the name 'Gurawalla' (translated as 'story teller') by local Indigenous people.

Nillumbik Shire Council has advised that the portrait of Alan Marshall, by Alan Martin, which was exhibited as a finalist at the 1956 Archibald Prize, is currently undergoing minor conservation works. This portrait, which has been in the Eltham Library for a number of years, was assessed by a painting conservator, who recommended a clean of its surface. The painting is currently off-site to be cleaned and have some minor repairs to the frame. It will be returned to the library for viewing after some upcoming library refurbishment works are completed.

National Volunteer Week - 15th to 21st May 2023

Like all historical and other community based groups within the Shire of Nillumbik, our Eltham District Historical Society runs on volunteers. Without them our Society would not exist, we would not have available our extensive collection, website, social media or even this newsletter. We thank all our volunteers for their commitment to ensuring we continue to operate for the benefit of all our members.



Alan Marshall sculpture by Marcus Skipper
Photograph - Jim Connor



Alan Marshall painting by Alan Martin
Nillumbik Shire Council art collection



Annual General Meeting - Saturday 15th April 2023

To satisfy the requirements of the Society's rules, notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the Eltham District Historical Society Incorporated will be held at 2.00pm on Saturday 15th April 2023, at the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre.

The agenda of the Annual General Meeting is set out below in accordance with the rules:

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of 2022 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
 - Two Vice Presidents
 - 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 two 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.

Since 1967 our members have helped to maintain and grow our Society and without their valued contributions, as well as assistance from Eltham and Nillumbik Shire Councils we would not be where we are today.

We urge members to contribute to the operation of our Society by becoming an office bearer or committee member. Please give the matter some consideration. If in doubt as to whether you can assist you could discuss this with one of our office bearers. The workload is not great. There are usually just five daytime committee meetings each year, alternating with our Society meetings.

We warmly welcome fresh ideas to help us to continue to run a vibrant organisation to maintain our intention of promoting, encouraging and assisting with the preservation and conservation of places and records of historical importance within the Eltham district.

We appreciate the support our Society receives from our local sponsors and encourage you to support them



Proudly supported by



*Any images displayed in this newsletter from the Shire of Eltham Pioneers Photograph Collection (SEPP) are held in partnership between Eltham District Historical Society and Yarra Plenty Regional Library (Eltham Library)

**Printed by courtesy of Vicki Ward MP,
State Member for Eltham**

Eltham District Historical Society - contacts

- **Jim Connor, President**
0418 379 497 – edhshistory@gmail.com
- **Russell Yeoman, Society Secretary**
9439 9717 – edhsoffice@gmail.com
- **Robert Marshall, Treasurer / Membership Secretary**
edhstreasurer@gmail.com

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