

# Newsletter

No. 273 December 2023

## 2023 - the year in review

In historical terms sometimes a year is seen as a relatively short time, whereas a year in a person's life can indeed be a significant period.

As usual, for the Eltham District Historical Society, 2023 has seen a mixture of activities, meetings and heritage excursions, with various people contributing to these events.

Our meetings this year have included talks about the history of Eltham Lower Park, new additions to the collection and records of interest, WW1 Soldier Welcome Home Committees, the Public Records Office Victoria (PROV) and a special evening when we reviewed the early Tim Burstall film 'The Prize'.

Our heritage excursions have covered historical aspects of the Eltham South Farms area, the south side of the Research Valley, a walk around the boundaries of the original Shillinglaw Farm in Eltham and an Eltham Gateway walk, through the southern section of Main Road and environs, known as the Eltham Gateway.

However, much of our activities are not public, with members of our Collections Team and others working behind the scenes, including sorting, scanning, cataloguing and recording details and photographs relating to our local history.

Without their dedicated volunteer efforts we would not be able to operate our Society or hold the extensive resources forming our collection, including over 14,000 images on the Victorian Collections website.

In 2024 we look forward to continuing to promote our local history, engage with our community and encourage people of all ages to value what there was, and what there is now.



Jim Connor



Shillinglaw Farm walk - 2 September 2023  
Photograph - Fay Bridge



Valued storytellers - Alan Marshall and Russell Yeoman  
Photograph - Jim Connor



Eltham Gateway walk - 4 November 2023  
Photograph - Liz Pidgeon

## Our Next Meeting - 7.30pm Wednesday 13th December 2023

Be prepared to have some fun at our next meeting, as this is our Christmas Celebration. In response to great demand this evening will see the return of our **Trivia** event, which we unfortunately had to cancel last year due to COVID concerns.

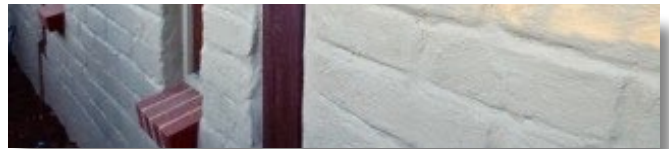


Yes, it is back, so if you wish, you are encouraged to dress up in your wildest, or at least your out of the ordinary gear, and come along to have some fun.....kaftans and 60's attire acceptable!! After all it is our Christmas **FUN**ction!

Our type of trivia night is one where you don't need to know a lot, and there will be others on your table to assist. As always, Society members and visitors are most welcome to attend this meeting, at **7.30pm on Wednesday 13th December** in the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre, Library Place, Eltham. You are welcome to bring your own drinks and some supper to share.

### Eltham Mudbrick House Tour

The Eltham and Panton Hill Mudbrick House Tours, a cherished tradition for longer-term Nillumbik residents, commenced in 1964 and



continued uninterrupted until the Kinglake Black Saturday Fires. From 2010 to 2021, the tours began at Montsalvat, featuring 300 mudbrick enthusiasts on a magical mini bus tour to explore carefully selected mudbrick homes. Eltham High School contributed 80 volunteers annually to ensure the event's smooth operation, creating a lively atmosphere.

The pandemic posed numerous challenges for the organisers, including health risks and uncertainties. Homeowners were reluctant to host large groups, and logistical hurdles like finding houses within a 5km radius and navigating lockdowns emerged. Due to these difficulties, the event was cancelled from 2020 to 2022 due to the risks associated with in-person tours.

In the face of volunteer shortages across Victoria post-pandemic, the organisers sought a format with fewer risks and less reliance on volunteers to keep the tour alive. Nillumbik Council transferred funding to the Nillumbik Mudbrick Association for the 2023 event. With only seven volunteers and one videographer, a virtual tour was organised, minimising both health risks and carbon footprint.

Deputy Mayor Geoff Paine, with his background in film and television, served as the charismatic MC. Convincing seasoned participants and volunteers of the virtual format's merit was a challenge, but the event gained a global audience through online ticket sales, reaching beyond Victoria to places like California, Germany, and France. Long-standing sponsors Morrison Kleeman, Bendigo Bank, R. Bliem & Associates, and M. Young Builders, continued their support.

On May 21st 2023, the online event garnered over 220 viewers, surpassing previous attendance records. The recorded broadcast has allowed the audience to continue growing. Virtual tour attendees expressed enthusiasm, comparing the virtual experience favourably to the pre-pandemic live tours. In the evolving post-pandemic world, virtual components are now routinely integrated into various activities. While the future remains uncertain, tour organisers hope to combine both in-person and online elements in future years. We invite everyone to experience the virtual tours success and consider participating in our future events.

Source: Nillumbik Mudbrick Association - [www.mudbrick.org.au](http://www.mudbrick.org.au)

It was in Eltham that the stirrings of the Australian film industry renaissance began, with the making of the award winning film *The Prize*. *The Prize* was the first film by Tim Burstall, who is considered to be the father of the modern Australian Film Industry. Born in England in 1927, Burstall was part of Eltham's artistic community from his early 20s until his 40s. Filmed mainly in Eltham, with an unpaid cast and crew largely from Eltham, *The Prize* won a bronze medal at the 1960 Venice Film Festival – rare for an Australian film at that time.

*The Prize* told about a little boy who won a goat at a country show only to have it stolen. The boy is befriended by a little girl and a rabbit-trapper, who try to help him recover the animal. The film starred Burstall's sons – Dan, around nine and Tom, six, as well as Marcus Skipper, seven and Liza Jacka, about the same age. Adults were jeweller and sculptor, Matcham Skipper, who was the rabbit, and Siddie Webster, the sideshow man. Burstall, who was then a public servant in the Antarctic Division, wrote the script at work.

*The Prize* – which took three months to shoot – is about 45 minutes long and has fewer than 200 words of dialogue. Local Dorian Le Gallienne composed the sound track. Although budgeted at £200 – which Burstall had originally borrowed to build a septic tank – costs swelled to £6000 – which was largely supplied by Patrick Ryan, nephew of Lord Richard Casey, later Australia's Governor-General. The film involved some risk for the amateurs. For instance Tom, who could hardly swim, hurtled down the fast Yarra River current at the Bend of Islands in a half-barrel. Tom's mother Betty, would lie up to her nose in the rapids, waiting for him to crash in his barrel and fall out into the deep water!

Eltham Films went on to make several documentaries from 1960 to 1965, featuring artists such as Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan, John Perceval, Albert Tucker and Clifton Pugh. In the mid 1960s, Burstall on a Harkness Fellowship to the US, worked on the western, *Hombre*, starring Paul Newman, and studied at the Actors' Studio in New York. After Burstall and Betty returned in 1967, she founded the La Mama Theatre in Carlton. This assisted many future well-known artists, including David Williamson, Judith Lucy and Richard Frankland. But Burstall suffered some setbacks, such as the commercial failure in 1969 of his first feature film, *2000 Weeks*, made for the art-house audience, with many scenes shot at Montsalvat. However Burstall then filmed *Stork*, the first 'ocker' comedy, based on a David Williamson play. It was the first Australian commercial feature success since the 1950s and scooped the pool at the 1972 AFI Awards. Burstall then formed Hexagon Productions with Roadshow and in 1973 made Australia's first 'R' certificate feature film, *Alvin Purple*. It was a huge commercial success and the first major feature bought for global distribution by a US studio.

Burstall's success was assisted by Government support, first under Liberal John Gorton, then Labor's Gough Whitlam. Burstall films, written by David Williamson, included *Petersen* (1974) and *Eliza Fraser* (1976). These films developed the careers of amongst others: Jackie Weaver, Jack Thompson, Wendy Hughes, Graeme Blundell, John Waters and Judy Davis. Burstall also produced films for Australian television including *Water Rats*, *The Man from Snowy River* series and early episodes of the ABC's *Bellbird*.

Before Burstall launched his film career with *The Prize*, he and his wife, like many in post-war Eltham, built their own mud-brick home. Several of their neighbours in Napier Crescent, Montmorency, did likewise. They included artists Arthur Boyd, John Perceval and Hal and Joy Peck. The dam in Napier Crescent, called Peck's Dam was a favourite painting place for Heidelberg School artist, Walter Withers.

Source - From *Nillumbik Now and Then* by Marguerite Marshall

## The Prize

On 11th October 2023 our members shared an extra special Society meeting when we viewed The Prize, the first film made by Tim Burstall. In doing so we reviewed this film, stopping at times to attempt to identify the main actors and where certain scenes were filmed around Eltham.

As a result of some commentary on social media, Marcus Skipper, one of the young actors in The Prize provided some comments, and a longer story, which he agreed we could use in our newsletter. Due to the length of his story we will need to start this in our next newsletter edition, however we can share the following background comments Marcus made about the film:

### Marcus Skipper's comments

'I was there. The Prize was shot over two summers, 1957 and 1958. Tim had been busy writing the Great AUSTRALIAN NOVEL. He put that aside and decided to start with a simple bit of story telling using film. There were a few kids movies made in Europe after the brutalism of the war. Searching for lost innocence. Tim sat down and wrote a kids adventure story. Tim would film on the weekend then rush into the editing suite and edit during the week. Of course he got excited and the film ballooned out to 50 minutes. That extra was shot in the second summer and was all the river stuff, the rabbitoh on the back roads and the blacksmith at Montsalvat. Since then it got chopped back to fit into different formats.

Remember back in the Fifties cinemas showed shorts, newsreels, cartoons, had an intermission then showed the main movie. Tim made The Prize originally to be a long 45 minutes and take up the first session. I don't have a copy but the Australian Centre for the Moving Image has an archive where all Tim's works are on the shelf.'

'In the second summer of filming The Prize travelling to the Bend of Islands or to Sweeneys Lane was deemed too time consuming. We were all growing up.

Dorian Le Gallienne, the Australian born French composer, buried in Eltham Cemetery, had written the superb music sound track for the movie. Tim was terribly excited. He felt on the strength of the music he could drag out the storyline into a bigger format. A full length movie.

The Jinker Ride by Le Gallienne is a wonderful bit of joyous romping along melody. The rabbitoh in his horse and jinker goes on a chase (around and around Eltham Lower Park). Alistair Knox had a new VW with good springs. The bonnet was removed and the cameraman sat on the petrol tank for tracking shots through the park. Tim hanging out the passenger door screaming directions. Alistair the stunt driver. Matcham the Rabbitoh in charge of the horse and jinker along the dusty backroads of Eltham looking for the naughty boys who stole the goat. The naughty boys hid with the goat in the Diamond Creek and hung out under the wooden bridge in Brougham Street.

I've been told seven goats were used in the movie. I think more. There was a woman at St Helena that had a milking goat farm. Sannen goats. They're white. The original kid goat was black and white. So any filming day with a goat, Betty Burstall, chief goat wrangler, would arrive with a white goat and she would apply black boot polish in the right places, so said goat appeared with correct continuity in the film. Beagle Boy goats. It didn't make any difference to the goats. They're great escape artists in their own right.'

Source - Marcus Skipper



Dan Burstall, a goat, Marcus Skipper  
along the Diamond Creek below the  
Eltham Leisure Centre  
Photograph - Marcus Skipper

When a cemetery was proposed for Kangaroo Ground, some people claimed that Kangaroo Ground was such a healthy place to live that they wouldn't need a cemetery! Indeed, the rich volcanic soil made Kangaroo Ground an ideal location for anyone hoping for a quiet yet productive farming life. But those people may have been less content had they known what was looming. Mick Woiwod's book "Kangaroo Ground Dreaming", which is thoroughly researched and a fascinating read, contains an account of several threats to the tranquillity of Kangaroo Ground. A brief summary follows.

**Logging.** In the 1880s Melburnians were heavily reliant on firewood for heating and cooking. It was suggested that a railway be built to Kangaroo Ground and Christmas Hills so that the stringybark forests could be logged and the wood conveyed to Melbourne economically by rail. The idea was killed off by the depression of the 1890s.

**Railway Extension.** Not long after the railway had reached Eltham in 1902, there was pressure that it be extended to Christmas Hills, prompted largely by a proposal to quarry there. The route from Eltham was surveyed and pegged out as far as Watsons Creek and a site was chosen for a station at Kangaroo Ground. Had the railway gone ahead, Kangaroo Ground would have steadily evolved from a farming community to a rural township, and could conceivably have ended up much like Diamond Creek is today. But several deep cuttings would have been needed through the hilly terrain, making construction prohibitively expensive. Wiser heads prevailed.



Site proposed for Kangaroo Ground railway station  
Photograph - Richard Pinn

**Quarrying.** In 1960 a mining consortium lodged an application to mine Kangaroo Ground's basalt deposits, with three quarries covering 415 acres stretching all the way from Eltham College to the Kangaroo Ground Memorial tower. The companies claimed that this would ultimately benefit the community, as the mining operations would get rid of the hills(!) and trees would be planted round the perimeter once quarrying had ceased. Local residents, led by Charis Pelling (initial president of EDHS), weren't having a bar of it. At a public hearing, they brought in numerous expert witnesses from Melbourne University who expressed strong opposition. The outcome was that the Minister for Planning ruled that none of the quarry permits be granted.

**Damming.** In 1972 Melbourne was facing a water shortage. The Government proposed to dam the Yarra River at Kangaroo Ground South with a larger dam on Watsons Creek and another at Christmas Hills. The damming would have flooded a third of Kangaroo Ground (including the cemetery) and much of Panton Hill and virtually all of the Bend of Islands. The proposal was strongly opposed both by the MMBW and by Bend of Islands residents, who saw it as an unethical solution to a short-term problem, which would have had devastating environmental consequences.

## Local Mother's Incredible Support in WW2

by Terry Beaton

This is a wartime story of a remarkable local woman, now at rest in Eltham Cemetery. Annie Barratt, born in England in 1882, married Arthur Castledine and had eleven children. Four were born in Northampton before 1914. After migrating to Victoria during WW1, Annie had four more sons, with Leslie born in Richmond in 1919. By 1926, the family was living on Old Eltham Road at Lower Plenty, where Annie's eleventh child, John, was born. Five of her eleven children later enlisted in WW2.

Arthur died in 1936, leaving Annie on her own. Her third daughter, Gladys had married Alan Hunter in 1930 and moved to Moonee Ponds. George was Annie's first of four sons to enlist on 23rd January 1940, aged 25. Two days later, at only 20, Leslie joined the CMF and became a driver with the 57th Infantry Battalion. Being a blacksmith, George joined the 2/2nd Engineer Company and was sent to the Middle East. After victories against the Italian Forces in Egypt and Libya, units of the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions, were sent to liberate Greece. Eight days after landing in Greece, George was killed in action on 18th April 1941, aged 26. Annie became the first known mother in the Shire of Eltham to lose a son in WW2.

Originally under the War Act (1914), CMF units couldn't be sent overseas. So having lost one son, Annie felt Leslie would be safe serving within Australia. Sidney was working as a machine rigger when he joined the Army at Eltham on 20th March 1941. Due to his mechanical skills, Sid was sent to the Australian Engineers Base Workshop. However, he discharged on 18th November 1941 and the next day in Melbourne, enlisted in the RAAF as Arthur Sidney Castledine, aged 29. After technical training, Sid was sent to No. 7 Aircraft Depot at Tocumwal in NSW. In 1942 Sid married an Eltham girl, Mercia "Polly" Arrowsmith; whose three brothers, Robert, Kevin (*joined as Keven*) and Edwin (*joined as Edward*) had all enlisted in 1941. Both Robert and Kevin had joined 8th Divisional Signals and been sent to Malaya, whilst Edwin had joined a CMF Anti-Aircraft unit.

With the "Fall of Singapore" on 15th February 1942, Robert and Kevin became prisoners of war (POWs). Their fate unknown by Annie and Polly for many months. Changes by the Curtin Government to the War Act, saw Edwin's unit sent to New Guinea in March 1942. Aside from her own grief, Annie was now supporting a daughter-in-law with three brothers in unknown peril and who had also lost her own mother that year.

In mid-April 1943, both Rob and Kevin were sent to the infamous Burma Railway, as part of the 3666 Australian POWs in "F" Force; of which 1,060 men perished and lie, or are commemorated in cemeteries in Thailand and Burma.

Edwin was evacuated from PNG in early 1943 with malaria, but sent back after treatment in Townsville. He returned again to Australia in late 1943, retrained as a searchlight operator and sent to Darwin in 1944. Meanwhile, Leslie was driving vital war supplies over the torturous road connecting the railhead at Alice Springs to the railhead at Katherine.

As married women couldn't enlist, by claiming to be "separated", Gladys Hunter enlisted on 2nd August 1943. Assigned to the Australian Army Medical Women's Service (AAMWS), she then worked as a nursing orderly at the 115th (Heidelberg) Military Hospital for the next two years.



AAMWS orderly (*RHS*) assisting Nursing Sisters  
Photograph - Australian War Memorial

Annie's youngest son, John, was the last to enlist and joined the RAAF on 13th July 1945, aged 21, and ended up with Sid at Tocumwal. By July 1945, Annie had three sons and a daughter still on war service, one son buried in Greece, two family friends captured, and another in Darwin. Incredibly, Robert and Kevin survived their brutal captivity and were repatriated home in late 1945. John was the last of Annie's four surviving children to discharge from wartime service on 15th May 1946.

Annie died in 1968, aged 82, having spent over twenty years with her sons and their families. Annie had befriended the families of Polly's veteran brothers, as did Annie's granddaughter, Joan Castledine, a committee member of the Eltham District Historical Society. Joan's father, Sid, passed in 1983, age 73. Leslie passed in 2004, age 85. Polly (Mercia) lived until 2014, aged 95. All three are at rest in the Eltham Cemetery. Whilst John is buried at Fawkner Memorial Park and Gladys is in WA. Their duty done.

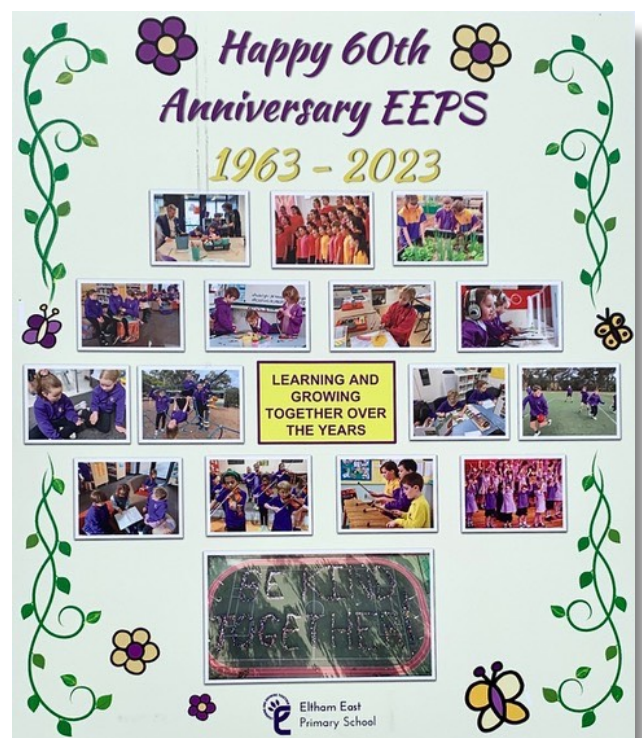
## 60 Years Ago at Eltham East Primary

Stephen Corneille

I was honoured to attend the 60th Anniversary celebrations at the Eltham East Primary School assembly on Friday 4th August 2023. I was joined by Lyndon Bradford, who was also part of our Grade 2 class and, like me, there for the school's very first day. After a wonderful introduction by the student leadership group, Lyndon and I gave short talks about our early years of the school. For the benefit of those interested and not able to attend, here are a few recollections from my time at the school from August 1963 to the end of Grade 6 in December 1967.

The school opened on August 5th 1963. Before that, the area's State School students went to either Dalton Street Primary or Research Primary. I went to Dalton Street, along with my identical twin brother John, until Grove Street — as it was called then and as all we inaugural students still call it — opened. As there was no bus from Dalton Street Primary in the afternoon, we'd have to walk 2.5 kilometres home along the main road until we got to Eltham Station; under the railway line through the pedestrian subway; along Diamond Street past the tip — now Andrew Park containing the Eltham Tennis Club — over the Diamond Creek wooden bridge; and then through the very dark and spooky pine forest next to the creek. Six year olds walking home alone through a dark forest. What could possibly go wrong?

All the students living between Beard Street and Henry Street moved to Eltham East once it opened. I, along with my twin brother John, Lyndon and 38 other students, started in Grade 2 with Miss Barkla. We had 41 students in our class on the first day, and that was the smallest class I was in during all my years at the school. You'd think that being an identical twin would have earned my brother and I a lot of attention in school, but you'd be wrong. As luck would have it, we had identical triplets in our class, Helen, Carol and Dianne Barker, so we didn't get a look in.



School advertising sign - Photograph - Liz Pidgeon



Grade 2 in 1963. That's me, third from the left on the second bottom row, with my brother John on my right and Colin Croft, the Show and Tell tiger snake boy next to him. Lyndon Bradford is third from the right on the bottom row. See if you can spot the Barker triplets - photograph Stephen Corneille

The world was a very different place when the school opened back in 1963. John Kennedy was still president of the USA. Martin Luther King was still a couple of weeks away from making his "I have a dream" speech. No one had landed on the moon, or even left a capsule to do a space walk.

At school, there were no hats, no sunscreen, no tan bark around the play equipment and no before or after school care. There was no problem with students bringing mobile phones to school as they didn't exist yet. Neither did personal computers, colour TVs, the internet, computer games, electric bikes and electric scooters.

At school we played with Yo Yos, marbles, also called alleys, and Scanlens swap cards, such as The Samurai and Man from Uncle. It was 4 cards to a pack for 6 pence. They came with a broken stick of inedible pink bubble gum. Our favourite TV shows were Star Trek, My Favourite Martian, Bewitched and I Dream of Jeannie.

Monday mornings, like now, would start with a school assembly. They weren't interesting like the one we just attended. The students never got to talk. It all seemed to be just our headmaster telling us new things we weren't allowed to do, and reminding us not to do the ones we already knew about.

The most frequent reminder was about not going into the bush around the school during recesses, because there could be snakes. It turned out that was true. We used to have Show and Tell, just like they do today, but ours were different. One day in Grade 6, my friend Colin Croft brought in a tiger snake he'd killed at the back of the school, where the library is now, during lunch time!



At the end of assembly we'd all sing the National Anthem, which wasn't Advance Australia Fair. In those days our anthem was God Save The Queen. After that they played marching music over the PA and we'd all march into our rooms. We were always getting told off because we couldn't remember when to sing "God save **our** Queen" and when to sing "God save **the** Queen". Well, I couldn't. I was a boy. I'm sure Lyndon could remember because she was a girl, and the girls were always the smartest. A lot of classes had streaming, where you'd sit in a row of desks according to how advanced you were with your classwork. Most of the red row, where the advanced kids sat, were girls. I remember how proud I was when I finally got promoted to red row, only to be devastated by being moved to blue, the least advanced row, just 5 minutes later because I got out of my seat to borrow a pencil. Apparently standing up without permission has a profound and long lasting effect on your IQ, because I stayed in the blue row for the rest of the year.

That wasn't the only example of streaming. When we were in Grade 5 they ran English classes where half of Grade 6 came into the Grade 5 room and half of the Grade 5 class went into the Grade 6 room. Once the class had settled our teacher said "You are the smartest kids in Grade 5 and 6, but don't tell the other kids that. They're being told that it's just a random mix of the two classes". Well, how long do you think we kept that secret?

The final streaming example came towards the end of Grade 6. The teacher would talk to each student and tell them whether they should go to High school or Tech school, based solely on academic achievement.

In the 1960s, every primary school student was given a  $\frac{1}{3}$  pint bottle of milk every day.  $\frac{1}{3}$  pint is about 200ml. A lot of students hated having to drink the milk, but I loved it. As soon as recess started I'd run out to where the milk crates were stacked, hoping to find some left over bottles. By recess the magpies had pecked holes in the lids of bottles on top, so you had to look for spare bottles in the crates underneath. The reason a lot of students hated the milk was that it was often warm by the time we got it because it'd been sitting in the sun. By recess it had had another hour in the sun. My best score was the day I found six extra bottles in the crates. Added to the one I'd already had in class, that made nearly  $1\frac{1}{2}$  litres of milk. I gulped it down quickly, but soon realised it was a hot day and the milk was starting to go off. I regretted those seven bottles for the rest of the day!

Things were a little cheaper back in 1963. A Four'n Twenty pie was one shilling (written as 1/-) which was the same as 12 pence (written as 12d). One shilling was the same as 10 cents, but we didn't start using dollars and cents until early in 1966. At the Fish and Chip shop, minimum chips was 6d (5c). Petrol was 3 shillings per gallon, which is equivalent to 8c per litre.

However, some things were the same then as they are today. If you were late to school, you were expected to bring a note from your mother explaining why. I remember the look on my teacher's face when I handed him a note that read:

*"My boys are late because they had to go to the shops to buy cigarettes for their father."*

As students, we had goals and success criteria, even in the early 1960s. Our goal was to avoid getting caught, and success was not getting the strap. Every school had that one teacher that everyone got sent to for the strap. At Eltham East it was Mr Maxwell. The strap was usually given for being noisy in class or going into the out of bounds areas, although it seemed that as long as you killed a snake while you were there, it was ok.

That first year there was only the main school building, with 6 rooms, and shelter sheds on the mid terrace, where the hall is now. Within a couple of years they added a portable to the top terrace. The top terrace, where the arts building is now, was just gravel.

The whole school was gravel or bitumen. Surprisingly, we did have a tennis court, just in front of where the hall is now, but in 3½ years at the school I only remember the net being up for two weeks. After playing tennis for the first week we decided to hit the tennis balls from the court down to Grove Street and then run down to find them in the bushes on the other side of the road. Rinse and repeat for the rest of lunch time. After that the net never appeared again.

Just like today there was no canteen. The nearest shop was the Dairy Queen milk bar on the Main Road, near the corner of Luck Street. If you had to buy your lunch, you walked down to the shops at lunch time. Some kids tried getting to the Fish and Chip shop in Dudley Street, opposite the Catholic School, but they were invariably late back to school and got told off. It wasn't the extra travel time that made them late, but the time taken to cook the chips.

There was one teacher for each class plus the head master. If a teacher was off sick, the head master took the class for the day. It meant the teacher was in the class without a break all day, and had to spend time in the yard during recesses and lunch. Our Grade 6 had 52 students. Well done John Kennedy, our teacher, for coping with that! John was a fantastic teacher, but at some stage during Primary School students stop believing their teachers are never wrong.

John was responsible for my favourite of those moments. A couple of times a year the class would troop off to the only classroom in school with a TV to watch an educational program on ABC. One day we watched a program on the principle of action and reaction and none of us understood it. Back in our own room, Albie Sewell asked "If, when I push on a rubbish bin, it's pushing just as hard back on me, how come I can push the bin away?" The whole class was eagerly anticipating the answer to this question. John's response was a classic: "Well, you push on the bin and the bin pushes back against you just as hard...and then you push a bit harder and the bin moves"!!! No one said anything, but you could read the room. Our teacher had just jumped the shark! If you're not familiar with that expression, Google it.

None of the buildings from 1963 are still there, but some remnants of the old school remain. The terracing where the main school, arts building and hall sit are the same as when we were there, along with the concrete retaining walls. One of the advantages of a school with only 7 teachers, including the headmaster, is that there're not as many people to catch you doing the wrong thing. We had very little play equipment, but the best piece was that retaining wall between the bottom level and the Arts level. The challenge was to see how fast you could climb from the top level to the bottom and back again, at the end where the fences from the three levels meet. I don't know when we started doing that, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't in Grade 2, and I know that by Grade 6 it was so little of a challenge that we'd stopped doing it.

Sitting on the stage during the 60th celebrations, with everyone in the hall, I wanted to sneak out on the pretence of going to the toilet and climb the wall again, to see if I could still do it, but there, between me and the door, was Principal Warren! There was no sneaking out...this time!

Then, as now, we could find ways to make a contest out of anything. Biro's weren't allowed at school, although no one could explain why. Instead, we had to use a fountain pen. We also had a nib pen which you dipped into the inkwell on the desk in case your fountain pen was broken. The nibs on fountain pens were quite soft and easily bent, but the nibs on the dip pens were really strong steel and never bent. The classroom floors were bare floorboards. Pretty soon we worked out that if you threw the nib pen just right, you could get it to stick into the floor, and the nib wouldn't bend. It was a small step from there to pen throwing contests. Your shot didn't count unless the pen stuck point first into the floor.

And with that final inspiration for the students, I'll leave it there. I'll see you all at the 70th anniversary in 2033.

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



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State Member for Eltham**

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



Community Bank  
Hurstbridge, Eltham,  
Diamond Creek,  
Doreen-Mernda  
and Kinglake

## Community banking - our local story

In 2008 Eltham community members began discussions with Bendigo Bank to establish a Community Bank branch. Eltham was a well banked town so the main purpose was to create a social enterprise which would reinvest most of its profit back into community organisations. The new Steering Committee launched a public campaign seeking pledges from prospective shareholders to provide the capital. In the nineties, \$500,000 was considered adequate capital backing, but by 2008 the target was \$1,000,000. Support grew slowly but eventually plateaued. Recognising a loss of momentum, the steering committee approached Valley Community Financial Services (VCFS) which operated Community Bank branches in Hurstbridge and Diamond Creek. At the same time the Mernda/Doreen steering committee had identified similar issues with its pledging campaign and sought support from VCFS. Ultimately, it was agreed that VCFS would establish both branches through a \$2,000,000 share raising, which proved successful. This enabled shareholders in both areas to invest in supporting their communities while providing the stability of an existing successful company to develop the branches.

The Eltham Community Bank Branch opened its doors on 7 October 2010 with just 154 customers and \$3.1 million in banking business. In its first five years the community dividend in grants and sponsorships totalled \$245,000, with funds going to a range of schools, sporting clubs and many community organisations in the area. The branch has also supported a range of cultural activities in Eltham, such as the Jazz Festival, Eltham High School Band, Shakespeare in the Park and the Practically Green Festival and it has a proud history of support for our volunteer emergency services organisations, including Kangaroo Ground, Research and Eltham CFA Brigades and Eltham SES.

The Eltham branch celebrated its ten year anniversary in 2020. Now in 2023 it is one of only three banks with a physical presence in the township and provides full banking services and mobile lenders who can visit at the customers' convenience. The Branch now has 3445 customers and \$208 million in banking business. It has now contributed just over \$1 million in community support, keeping faith with that early vision.

Banking services and customer needs may change, but Community Banking is here to stay, because this is where we live. Having established a consistent income stream for community organisations, it's up to Eltham people to continue growing the benefit.

Malcolm Hackett OAM

Chairman, Valley Community Financial Services Pty Ltd

(Administering Hurstbridge, Diamond Creek, Doreen & Mernda  
and Eltham Community Bank Branches and Kinglake Branch)