2024 - a year of many anniversaries

Jim Connor

As we look forward to another historical year we know there are a number of anniversaries to be remembered, as well as being detailed in our newsletters. Some are mentioned here:

Alan Marshall - The 21st January 2024 it will be the fortieth anniversary of the death of the author Alan Marshall, who is buried in the Nillumbik Cemetery, at Diamond Creek. He is well known for his numerous short stories, newspaper columns, magazine articles and published Indigenous Australian stories and legends. A sculpture of Alan Marshall, by Marcus Skipper, is located outside the Eltham Library.

Eltham Library - The popular Eltham library was opened, thirty years ago, on Sunday, 22 May 1994 by the Shire of Eltham. Council's design brief stipulated that the building must respond to its park setting, "complement the heritage of the area and community", use low (or no) maintenance materials, and have minimal solid interior walls. While there have been some operational changes since the opening it has continued to actively support the local community.

Eltham Living and Learning Centre - The Eltham Living and Learning Centre was established with support from Eltham Shire Council in 1974. A grant from the Federal Government enabled the Council to purchase the historic homestead (c1857) and associated farm buildings on the property at 739 Main Road, Eltham, which became the Eltham Living and Learning Centre, which celebrates it's fiftieth anniversary this year.

Montsalvat - The Montsalvat artists' colony in Eltham was established by Justus Jörgensen on land purchased ninety years ago, in 1934. It is set among gardens on five hectares (12 acres) of land, and is home to many buildings, including houses, halls, studios, galleries and stables. All the buildings were designed and built by residents using materials from a variety of sources, including Victorian era buildings then being demolished in the city centre.

Shire of Eltham - Due to a State government implemented municipal restructure program, the former Shire of Eltham, established in 1871, ceased to exist on 15 December 1994, thirty years ago this year. The shire covered a semi-suburban and rural area extending north from the Yarra River and shared an early history of farming, fruit growing and dairying, as well as gold mining.

Nillumbik Shire Council - On 15th December 1994, thirty years ago, the Shire of Eltham along with parts of the City of Whittlesea, the Shire of Diamond Valley and the Shire of Healesville, were merged into the new Shire of Nillumbik. The Kinglake district was transferred to the Shire of Murrindindi, while Montmorency, Briar Hill and Lower Plenty areas were transferred to the City of Banyule.

Next Society Meeting
7.30pm Wednesday 14th February 2024
Eltham Senior Citizen's Centre
Library Place, Eltham

Heritage Excursion
2.00pm Saturday 2nd March 2024
Walking the Kurrum Yallock (Plenty River). *See further details on page 2*

Our Next Meeting - 7.30pm Wednesday 14th February 2024

Our EDHS member Irene Kearsey is forever searching, researching and at times discovering hidden historical gems. One such discovery is finding details about the life and career of "Senior Constable Dungey – Eltham's third policeman" and what he and his wife had in the Eltham police house; now our Local History Centre at 728 Main Road, Eltham.

At our meeting on Wednesday 14th February 2024, Irene with talk about the career of Arthur Eggleston Dungey leading him to Eltham and then describe what was in the house.

We now know how he and wife Louisa furnished the house in 1890, down to the number of teaspoons. If you had ancestors in 19th century Victoria, Irene has a suggestion for your research that might reveal such details.

Eltham Police house - 728 Main Road, Eltham
Photograph - * EDHS collection

As always, Society members and visitors are most welcome to attend this meeting, at **7.30pm on Wednesday 14th February** in the Eltham Senior Citizens' Centre, Library Place, Eltham.

March Excursion - Saturday 2nd March - Walking the Kurrum Yallock (Plenty River)

Kurrum Yallock, a.k.a. the Plenty River, is Melbourne's third river. While diminished since European settlement, the river provides an important wildlife corridor and recreational resource, along with many links to its settlement heritage.

It is a defining feature of the region, weaving its way through local suburbs and parklands. It is often hidden from general view, emerging at bridges and along its extensive trail network.

Anne Paul, who will lead this walk, has undertaken extensive research about the Plenty River and has recently written a book titled "*Walking the Kurrum Yallock (Plenty River): History, Heritage and Environment*".

On Saturday 2nd March we will meet at the Old Lower Plenty Road bridge, for a 2.00pm start. The walk takes approximately 3 hours and follows a figure of eight loop, around the bridge.

Kurrum Yallock (Plenty River)
Photograph - Anne Paul

Parking is available on Old Lower Plenty Road, on the western side of the old bluestone bridge, opposite Jimba Court, Viewbank. This free walk is open to the general public as well as Society members. Dogs are not permitted on Society excursions.

Copies of Anne's book, *Walking the Kurrum Yallock (Plenty River): History, Heritage and Environment* (2023) will be available for sale at $20 each, cash only.

The Beginning of Local Government in Eltham

<div align="right">Jim Connor</div>

(This is based on an article published in the Diamond Valley News on March 31, 1964)

What may be considered the birth of local government in the district came as a result of a meeting of landowners and house holders of the Eltham Road District in the Fountain of Friendship Hotel, on October 14th 1856.

The purpose of the meeting was to form a district roads board. The first secretary was Andrew Ross of Kangaroo Ground and the first chairman is thought to have been Henry Dendy, but the early records are no longer extant.

Fountain of Friendship Hotel
Photograph - * EDHS collection

In 1856 the Eltham Roads Board was given permission to erect a toll gate and toll house on the north side of the Lower Plenty bridge. It was this Roads Board that opened up the new Eltham Road, between Lower Plenty and Eltham. This alteration of route became operative in 1869.

The finding of gold in the hills beyond Eltham had given the impetus to development and had made Eltham something of a centre.

A court of petty sessions was established in Eltham by order of the Governor, late in 1858.

In 1871, when the population of the area concerned was about 2000, the Eltham Roads Board became the Shire of Eltham. For the next couple of decades Eltham's progress was similar to that of most of the country towns in Victoria, establishing itself as a thriving rural community.

The passing of the gold digging era caused something of a depression in Eltham, but by 1925 a building boom was experienced by the town.

Shire of Eltham Coat of Arms
Photograph - EDHS collection

During that year many houses were built, and a new hotel was erected replacing the one built more than half a century before when Eltham had two hotels, a flour mill, brewery, a brickworks and other important industries. In 1928 Eltham Higher Elementary School was finished.

Eltham was "lit"for the first time when electricity was bought to the area in 1926.

New shire offices and a public hall, on the corner of Main Road and Arthur Street, Eltham were opened in 1941 to replace the old shire offices, in Kangaroo Ground, destroyed by fire in February 1934.

Eltham Shire Offices and Shire Hall
Photograph - * EDHS collection

Alan Marshall - An Anniversary

Jim Connor

Alan Marshall, the internationally renowned author, 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.

For much of his adult life he regularly travelled, while continuing to write many stories, often based on his life experiences. Alan was closely associated with the Eltham district and while living here from 1955, was engaged in local activities. In 1971 he wrote the book *"Pioneers and Painters"*, to commemorate the centenary of the Shire of Eltham.

He was internationally recognised for his writings, including those related to children. His most famous book, "I Can Jump Puddles" is based on his childhood experiences.

He died on 21st January 1984, forty years ago this year, and his remains are interred at the Nillumbik (Diamond Creek) Cemetery.

Alan Marshall, his car and Sunliner caravan
Photograph - *EDHS collection

Book Review - Michael Wilson, Eltham Goldsmith and Sculptor - My Journey

Michael and Wendy Wilson have been living in Eltham for fifty years. Recently Michael decided to write what is an engaging and entertaining journey through Michael and Wendy's life.

He recounts his love of Wendy, his family, friends, and his many acquaintances, as well as his love of Eltham and district.

Kate Palmer AM, wrote the forward for this book saying, "…it is a window into the world of a true craftsman, an award winning master goldsmith - an artisan who can transform precious metals, wood and gold into exquisite sculptures, jewellery and works of art".


Kate also says "This book is a tribute to Michael Wilson. A man who is fascinated by the world around him and who is inspired by his experiences in that world. Every piece tells a story – about emotion, about a man and his dreams and his fascination for all things engineering."

Michael also recounts his extensive love affair with things with four wheels, from billy carts as a boy, to the various cars he has enjoyed, particularly his favourite Lotus 7, which he states is "a sophisticated billy cart". He also shares many memorable experiences with others pursuing automotive escapades.

It is well written, informative, and just an amazing life story, a very personal record of a life well explored and well lived.

This memoir can be purchased at the Michael Wilson Gallery, 725 Main Road, Eltham.

Jim Connor
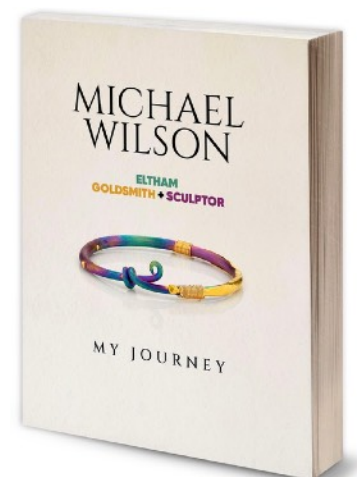
(As 2024 marks the 90th anniversary year of the establishment of Montsalvat, our EDHS newsletter during this year will feature a series of articles by Richard Pinn about significant people who lived and worked at Montsalvat.)

Justus Jörgensen (1893-1975)

Justus Jörgensen trained in Melbourne initially as an architect, but then turned to painting and studied at the National Gallery School of Art under Frederick McCubbin, later becoming assistant to Max Meldrum. With his wife Lily and several artist friends, he toured Europe in 1924-28, painting in Italy, Spain, France and England, while gaining inspiration from the paintings of the European masters. Some of his own paintings were hung at prestigious galleries in Paris and London in 1926-27.
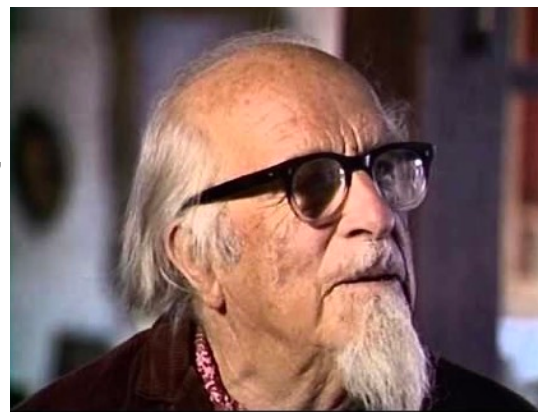
Justus Jörgensen
Photograph - geni.com

Upon his return to Australia, he taught in a studio at Brighton, and later in a city studio in Queen Street. In 1934, when working on the design and construction of a studio in Eltham for cartoonist Percy Leason, he had a grand dream of creating a Gothic-style artists' colony at Eltham. He had little money, but land was relatively cheap, second-hand building materials were free and he had enthusiastic friends and followers willing to provide their expertise, labour and at times financial support.

And so Montsalvat was born……you know the rest.
Sources: Australian Dictionary of Biography and Wikipedia.

Betty Roland (1903-1996)

Betty Roland was a noted author and playwright, best known for "The Touch of Silk", a play about the alienation felt by a French woman who marries an Australian soldier and moves to the Victorian Mallee, which was first performed in 1928. She also wrote the script for an early Australian talkie film, "The Spur of the Moment".

In 1933, she formed a relationship with Guido Baracchi, one of the founders of the Australian Communist Party. She had booked a passage to London; it turned out that he, delivering confidential documents to the Kremlin, had planned to travel on the same ship. They moved to Moscow, where she worked on the Moscow Daily News and smuggled literature into Nazi Germany. They returned to Australia and moved to Sydney, where Betty wrote left-wing plays, published in the Communist Review magazine. At the same time she wrote numerous radio plays as well as a comic strip published in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Betty Roland
Photograph - The Eye of the Beholder

She lived at Montsalvat in 1948-1950 (with her daughter Gilda Baracchi) but seemingly did not get on well with Justus Jörgensen and moved to London. But in 1973-79 she returned to Montsalvat, where she organised its manuscript collection and worked on the biography-cum-memoir of Jörgensen, "The Eye of the Beholder" and romantic fiction for the London market.
Sources: Australian Dictionary of Biography and Wikipedia.

Two Eltham Women Served in WW1

by Terry Beaton

Unlike WW2, only Army nurses went overseas on active service in WW1. Some 2,860 served, of which 25 died. Medical orderlies in the various Army medical units were male. Some females did serve as nursing orderlies, but with voluntary auxiliary organisations, like the VAD. A list of Eltham Shire enlistees revealed that two local Eltham sisters had served in WW1 as nurses. They were Edith Caroline Monckton Miller and Frances Mary Miller, who lived with their mother, Rhoda Miller (*nee Monckton*), at "*Rellim*", Eltham. Evidently the family had attended St Margaret's Church, as three of Rhoda Miller's children are listed on its Roll of Honour, though Rhoda had moved to Murrumbeena in 1917, where she died in 1922, aged 78.
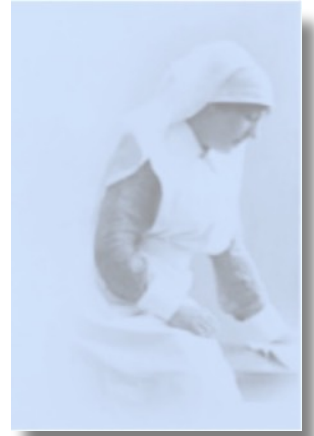
The girls' brother, Ernest Russell Miller, was the first to enlist on 2nd September 1914, aged 32. He sailed to the Middle East on 20th October 1914 aboard the HMAT A14 "***Euripides***" and served with the 4th Infantry Battalion at Gallipoli and the Western Front rising to the rank of Corporal. He returned home on 25th November 1918.

Edith's records detail that she trained and qualified at Royal Melbourne Hospital and was working as Charge Nurse at a private hospital by 1914. About a year after Ernest had enlisted, Edith joined the Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS), as Staff Nurse (*Lieutenant*) on 12th August 1915, aged 33. Her records do not indicate when Edith left Australia, but on 6th November 1915 she was admitted to 4th Auxiliary Hospital in Abyssinia suffering mumps and had been on duty at Heliopolis.

She sailed from Alexandria to England on 13th August 1916 on the RMS "***Kanowna***", where she joined 4th AGH at Whalley. Then on 28th February 1917 she sailed to France for duty with 2 AGH at Wimmereux. Ten months later she returned to England to undertake transport duty, caring for returning wounded. On 20th December 1917 she left England on HMAT "***Runic***", arriving in Melbourne on 10th February 1918. Edith then served at 11 AGH at Caulfield, until she was discharged on 25th November 1918, but continued working at Caulfield until 1921, when she moved to New Zealand, to become Mrs Griffiths, marrying a NZ veteran from Caulfield.

It is assumed that Frances also qualified at Melbourne Hospital, but for some reason, she didn't enlist in the AANS. However, *Wikinorthia* reports she became one of some 130 qualified Australian nursing sisters who paid their own way to join the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service (**QAIMNS**) in the UK. It seems she sailed aboard the RMS "***Karoola***" in late December 1915. On arrival Frances was sent to 2nd Birmingham Hospital for training, then sailed to France in April 1916 to a British Military Hospital caring for wounded troops. In early 1917 Frances was hospitalised herself for a serious illness.

By October 1918 she was attached to a Stationary Military Hospital in France, where she remained until 4th January 1919. After returning to England, she was demobbed from the QAIMNS, but succeeded in joining 10th AGH in London, whilst waiting repatriation. Frances boarded SS "***Osterley***" on 21st February 1919 and disembarked in Melbourne on 26th June 1919 and was discharged. But Frances then continued to care for veterans at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital until retirement. She passed away in 1952, aged 73. She had never married.

Yet the Miller sisters were not the only nurses who served from Eltham Shire, as two nurses from Yarra Glen also served, yet are apparently not on any Shire honour roll. They are Isabell Russell Ross and Matron Jessie McHardy White. Isabell Ross was another nurse like Frances Miller, who had sailed to England at her own cost to join the QAIMNS. Little is known of her service, but she served in France as she died in 11 AGH at Caulfield on 12th December 1924 having suffered ill-health since being a victim of a mustard gas attack. She is buried in Yarra Glen Cemetery.

Two Eltham Women Served in WW1

Matron White had joined the AANS in 1905, two years after it was formed as a branch of the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC). She sailed with the first AIF convoy aboard HMAT A24 "**Benalla**" on 29th October 1914 to the Middle East and worked in hospitals in Cairo before the Gallipoli landings. Although she was returned to Australia on 24th September 1916 for discharge due to her age being 46, she re-enlisted in June 1917, claiming to be 44, when the war escalated and an urgent call was raised for nurses. She sailed on RMS "**Mooltan**" in June 1917 leading the first nursing unit of 89 nurses to Salonika, where they stayed until March 1919. Matron White became a highly decorated veteran, being awarded the MBE, RRC and other decorations for her meritorious service. She returned to Melbourne on 28th June 1919 and was discharged on 7th August 1919. She died at home in Hawthorn in 1957, aged 87.

Terms Used:

RMS – Royal Mail Steamer (*contracted to carry mail*)
AGH: – Army General Hospital.   VAD – Voluntary Aid Detachment.
RRC: – Royal Red Cross – (*decoration of military nursing*)
QAIMNS – Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service

Brief Comparison Between WW1 and WW2   by Terry Beaton

During the Great War some 416,000 males enlisted as a required British Subject. It was not until the stoush between the Whitlam and British Governments in the mid-1970s, that several Acts were changed to stipulate that only Australian Citizens could serve in Defence, or work in the Public Service. Until then, two flags were also flown at Government buildings and installations, being the Union Jack and the Australian National Flag.

Some 61,720 died in WW1, with 155,000 wounded and 4,999 taken prisoner, due to the brutality of trench warfare and improved weaponry. In comparison, over twice as many served in WW2, including over 80,000 females. Yet with one third *less* deaths than WW1 with 39,366, but with almost six times more taken captive, with 30,600 male and female POWs due to the disasters in Greece, Singapore and Dutch East Indies (*now Indonesia*). One reason for the lower death toll in WW2 is attributed to the crucial invention of penicillin by Dr Alexander Fleming in 1928, which saved thousands of lives due to the reduction of infection from wounds and disease.

The high number of captives in WW2, also saw nursing sisters become POWs for the first time. On 2nd August 2023 a bronze statue of Sister Vivian Bullwinkle (*later became Matron Stratham*) was unveiled at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, becoming the first servicewomen to be immortalised in bronze. Sister Bullwinkle, as a young Army Nursing Sister, was the sole survivor of a WW2 massacre by the Japanese on Bangka Island. Her statue serves to represent all the women who served in Australian Army Nursing Service (AANS) in both wars, but especially the 72 other nurses that left Singapore on the ill-fated SS "**Vyner Brooke**". Twelve were lost at sea when it was sunk by Japanese aircraft on 14th February 1942, whilst 21 survivors who made it ashore were forced back into the water, then shot and killed during the massacre at Radji Beach. Though also shot, Vivian survived by feigning death. After treatment, she endured over 3 years of captivity along with 31 other surviving nurses, of which 8 died during their captivity. Many ex-POWs captured in Singapore gave high praise to the courage and professionalism of the Army nurses.

Sister Vivian Bullwinkle
Photograph -
Australian Arts Review

Recollections of Marcus Skipper

This photo is a publicity pic for Eltham Films. These are the culprits responsible.

It's late 50's. Tim Burstall with glasses is about 29. This photo is taken by Tony Knox. Tony Knox was the first son of the first wife of Alistair Knox. He began his marvellous life as a very talented photographer before he became a famous restaurateur of Mietta's in Carlton. He took stills for Eltham Films.

This shot is not Eltham but I'll swear it's Studley Park. Needing a bush background for a film Studley Park near Kew was the quick nearest go-to location. This photo has a very interesting composition. Angular and dynamic.

Tim Burstall, Alan Harkness, Gerard Vandenberg, Patrick Ryan
Photograph - Tony Knox

Film Director Tim is in the top left hand corner, mouth open giving direction from above. Like God. Head comes out of the clouds and says do it my way or else. Film Directors who are never seen on film are called God by actors. Tim is in his duffle coat. "Tim of Antartica" was his title. Tim got his when he went to Antartica. Duffle coats are a Dutch waterproof double weave course woven wool coat with huge pockets. Gigantic pockets! Tim would have books, notebooks, pens, scripts, manuscripts, contracts, magazines and newspapers. In the other pocket would be lunch. sandwiches of cheese and tomatoes. A thermos of Betty's sweet black coffee and a dozen oranges.

When important questions of style, philosophy, art, the madness of humans and the stories to tell stopped work, Tim would whip out an orange and peel it slowly. A metaphor for the discussion. Then when a solution/punch line seemed imminent he'd reward all with a wedge of sweet orange. And it would be back to business. I saw it many times on his film sets. Movies are a collaborative art form. Many skills are required from putting out spot fires to peeling oranges. Tim's take on it was if the great genius story teller Michaelanglo were alive today he'd be telling his story not in marble but in movies. New technologies were the key.

Below Tim is Alan Harkness. Harkness was a film stock loader and motion picture camera technician. He was a tech nerd. He spent his entire time opening up the little door on the side of the camera and watching the wheels go round. Tim found Alan at the Commonwealth Film Unit. The Commonwealth Film Unit was run by the government to make films and documentaries about life in Australia. During the war it sent camera men to the front to bring back news and information for newsreels and intelligence purposes. They were set up behind Defence Headquarters on St Kilda road. That's where Alan was with all the cameras and wheels and filmy things.

Tim had discovered this when at the cessation of WW2 hostilities he was recruited from Melbourne University to head south and write copy as a journalist with the film unit to document the opening of the Mawson Antarctic Base, near the South Pole in 1947. Hence he was supplied with a government issue polar-grade Duffle coat. Tim of the Antarctic. He also found where all the cameras and operators were kept.

On the right bottom corner is Gerard Vandenberg. Listening intently to directions from the director. Getting an earful. Vandenberg was a young Dutch backpacker washed up in Melbourne and fell into Tim's orbit. He became a film cinematographer. Worked for Tim and Eltham Films in the early days and eventually went back to Europe and made a huge name for himself working extensively in the post war West German film industry. He also wore a duffle coat. A really big camel coloured one with sewn on hood. In his pockets were light meters, camera lens, filters, tool kits, notebooks, assorted cords and connecting rods. In the top right hand corner is Patrick Ryan. Patrick was a dandy and a playboy. Drove a very elegant Riley saloon with leather upholstery and walnut fittings. It was the Eltham Films staff car until Patrick bought Tim a Landrover.

Tim convinced Patrick that making movies was the best fun one can have with their clothes on and Patrick believed him. All Patrick had to do was pay for them all to do it. Patrick was Mister Moneybags. He bankrolled the fun. That why he has a slight pensive frown in the top right hand corner. He's not sure he's getting his money's worth. Patrick Ryan had family money. He was related to Lord Casey, Australia's Governor General. It was the family tradition that they be in charge and Tim offered Patrick the job to be in charge and be Producer at Eltham Films.

Patrick bought an old bluestone Lutheran church in South Yarra and set up shop close to the Commonwealth Film Unit where the cameras were. It was used as a soundstage, film set, editing suite and offices. Eltham Films made films in South Yarra. The centre piece of the photograph is a rather dramatic probing concertina camera lens cover that Tim is sort of looking into and talking at. Those lens covers are used when filming detail closeups to avoid light flares on the lens.

Lighting small objects is complicated. After Patrick had paid for 'The Prize' and then the next film 'Two Thousand Weeks', they hit on the idea of making short arty documentaries to sell to the ABC. They were looking for cashflow. Eltham Films pumped out a dozen or so shorts on the work of current Melbourne artists. Arthur Boyd, John Perceval, Albert Tucker, Fred Williams. The camera in the centre of the photograph is the one they used. Tim had found his Patron in Patrick Ryan.

Tim had been a penniless young dreamer and Ryan turned his opportunities around. All penniless young dreamers need patrons. At this time John and Sunday Reed of Heidi fame were being patrons to a swag of young artists. Jörgensen of Montsalvat was offering sanctuary and guidance to musicians, painters and craftspeople. Jörgensen himself had patrons, his brother Alef and Mervyn Skipper, who paid for the land on which to build Montsalvat.

Back in the day the Eltham valley with the Diamond Creek meandering through it was described as "pretty and picturesque". There was a handmade building boom after the war. Tim was starting a family and followed a group of mates from Melbourne University out to Eltham from the end of the war onwards. He bought a block on Napier Crescent for £100 and he and Betty Burstall built a mudbrick house for £600. It was 20 minutes walk from the Eltham pub. The communal hub. And 30 minutes from the train station. Building a new and better world was uppermost in their minds. They were young and on fire. Could they do things differently? They joined the Communist Party and enjoyed the lively discussions and arguments about what that better world might be. A part of the activity was monthly film nights. Alternate art house movies of hope and freedom along with a party member and his projector who humped the gear around suburb to suburb in his ute fired up Tim's imagination.

I can make movies! Eltham Films. Let's get this show on the road! And he did.

Source: From Marcus Skipper via Facebook

Lena Cooper Skipper, nee Wilshire, 1889-1970, Painter and Montsalvat Founder

Lena Cooper Wilshire was born in Paddington, N.S.W. in 1889. She was the only child of a prominent Sydney family; her father was Henry Austin Wilshire, an architect and her mother was Hepzibah Wilshire, nee Stewart.

Several historical newspaper accounts describe the family as one of the oldest in Australia, with James Wilshire arriving in the year 1800, another cited 1792.

Lena had a very comfortable childhood. As a young woman she travelled to the United Kingdom, United States of America and to Shanghai, China where in 1913 at the age of 24, she married fellow Australian Mervyn Skipper. Mervyn was working for the Eastern Cable Company as a station operator.

They moved to England where their first daughter Helen was born in 1914, after which they moved to Western Australia where their second child Sonia was born in "a little wooden cottage" beside the Swan River in 1918. After which the family moved again – to New Zealand where son Matcham was born in 1921. All three children would become artists.

When the Skippers returned from Wellington to Australia, they engaged US Architect Walter Burley Griffin (also a local resident at the time) to design a two-story residence for them to be built in Eaglemont. It was completed in 1928 and is notable for its gallery and engaging living rooms with corner windows. Mervyn became a successful writer.

Mervyn and Lena met Justus Jörgensen in 1928. They enrolled their three children in his painting school in the city and Lena also took classes with him.

A few years later they moved to Eltham, – to the half built fledging Montsalvat and became foundation members of the Art Colony, founded by Jörgensen.

In 1944 Lena purchased the cottage known as Jarrold Cottage or White Cloud, at 701 Main Road Eltham, regarded as an historically significant building in Eltham, which she used as a studio.

Lena Skipper, 1933
Photograph - The Eye of the Beholder

She enjoyed gardening and was known as a landscape and seascape painter of considerable ability, but considered herself a student.

She had an exhibition with the Victorian Artists' Society in 1954 and at one stage may have considered or set up for a short time a studio and art gallery in San Remo near Phillip Island.

In 1956 Mervyn passed away aged 70. Lena remained living at Montsalvat till around 1963, when she moved to the Main Road property.

Lena died on April 29th, 1970 aged 82. Mervyn and Lena are buried together in Eltham Cemetery, near Montsalvat's chapel. Their resting place is unmarked.

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

*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)

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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

Experience Eltham Cemetery

Julia Drew

The founding members

2024 marks the 166th year since the establishment of the Eltham Cemetery. The cemetery is overseen by a Trust, a system established in the 1800's which still forms the basis of cemetery management today.

Trust Members act as custodians, their primary role is to manage the cemetery efficiently and to preserve funds for its future maintenance. Trust Members are usually local residents who volunteer their time, skills, and vision to the long-term preservation and sustainability of the cemetery.

There have been 73 Trust Members of the Eltham Cemetery over its 166 years, including the six members currently serving.

The founding seven members, appointed by the Governor on the 6th of February 1860, are frequently found in the annals of Eltham history, though their involvement in the cemetery is often not listed in their achievements.

Thomas Sweeney, served for eight years until his passing in 1867. Thomas is buried at the Eltham Cemetery in the Sweeney family plot in the Roman Catholic section. The family site features multiple headstones. His position on the Trust was filled by his son John.

Richard Lane, sadly was murdered in Eltham in January 1861, before the first official burial occurred in the cemetery. He was replaced by Patrick O'Callaghan.

The obelisk at the gravesite of Alfred Armstrong

The headstone at gravesite of Thomas Sweeney.

Alfred Armstrong, represented the Trust for four years before stepping down in June 1864. 20 years later in 1884, he joined the Trust again where he served for another nine years until he passed. He is buried in the cemetery in the Church of England section. His monument is an obelisk rather than a traditional headstone, the only one featured in the cemetery. It is also the tallest freestanding monument/headstone structure in the cemetery. He was replaced by Alfred Warren Smith (1864) and David George Clark (1893).

Richard Warren, served for four years before resigning in June 1864. His position was filled by Thomas Batt.

John Pierson/Pearson completed eight and half years with the Trust, resigning in June 1868. John Kilpatrick assumed his position.

Thomas Hunniford undertook eight and a half years on the Trust, ceasing in 1868. He was replaced by Charles Souter. Thomas died in 1885 and is buried in the Eltham Cemetery. He is not memorialised.

Thomas Cochrane served just short of 14 years with the Trust before stepping down in 1874. His position was not filled.

Eltham Cemetery
EST. 1858